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Heritage on the Margins? Central and Eastern European Perspectives

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This introductory article reflects heritage-making processes in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) context. It links discussions of the ZRC SAZU multidisciplinary research program on heritage with case studies presented at the conference Heritage on the Margins? (November 2023, Ljubljana). The focus of the article is heritage formation and the performative influence of heritage in minority, remote, linguistic, industrial, (post)imperial, (post)socialist and otherwise marginalized settings.

▪ **Keywords**: heritage, critical heritage studies, marginality-centrality, Central and Eastern Europe

Uvodni članek tematskega zvezka prinaša razmislek o procesih ustvarjanja dediščine v srednje- in vzhodnoevropskem kontekstu. Besedilo povezuje razprave in raziskave večdisciplinarnega raziskovalnega programa o dediščini, ki poteka v ZRC SAZU, s študijami primerov, ki so bili predstavljeni na konferenci Dediščina na obrobjih? (november 2023, Ljubljana). Osrednja os premislekov sta tvorjenje in performativna moč dediščine v manjšinskih, odročnih, jezikovnih, industrijskih, (post)imperijskih, (post)socialističnih in drugače marginaliziranih okoljih.

▪ **Ključne besede**: dediščina, kritične dediščinske študije, marginalnost-centralnost, srednja in vzhodna Evropa

The relations, flows, and shifts between margins and centres are at the core of this thematic issue. They have prompted us to reflect on the geographical, political, and academic margins and centres of Europe using the heritage angle to discuss multiple relational processes with, within, and beyond the so-called Central and Eastern Europe[1] (CEE) that seems to be a promising laboratory for such discussion. Namely, an explicit or implicit distance from the core European narratives and symbols is a thread that runs through ethnographies and papers included in this thematic issue. How to think about marginality and centrality from within this part of the world? What can be gained by approaching European heritage and memory from CEE? What are the inner margins of CEE? The relationship between margins and centres is always positional and dynamic; it "must involve an awareness that traditional axes are in fact in motion, […] at the

[1] Similarly as Ognjen Kojanić (2020), we use the notion of CEE as a general designation of the region, and not as limited to the temporal container of post-socialism. We acknowledge its internal differences and multiple axes of centrality-peripherality.

same time it is worth stressing that not everything, everywhere is in flux. Being at the (perceived) centre – economically, politically, discursively – still matters" (Whitehead et. al., 2020a: 98).

Heritage

"Heritage today is a broad and slippery term", Rodney Harrison (2013: 5) noted more than ten years ago in his textbook on critical approaches to heritage, and thus reaffirmed a series of (critical) heritage scholars that had – soon after the sedimentation of the concept with the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972) in the global value regimes – pointed out its ambiguity (Lowenthal, 1985, 1998) and various social and political ends (Samuel, 1994; Smith, 2006). "It might be used to describe anything from the solid – such as buildings, monuments, and memorials, to the ethereal – songs, festivals, and languages" (Harrison, 2013: 5). Heritage covers a range of things and phenomena, from large to small, grandiose (e.g. operas in our case study, see Meašić, 2025) to modest (e.g. autodramas, see Senčar Mrdaković, 2025), natural or man-made, from whole landscapes to archaeological fragments, skills, and songs. It can refer to magnificent palaces or simple houses, wilderness, urban environments, memory trails (see Gregorač, 2025), and the tacit knowledge of industrial workers (see Vodopivec, 2025). It operates at different spatial, temporal, and institutional scales referring to the connections between various groups, their pasts, shaping of presents, and envisioning futures. Consequently, a much broader understanding of heritage emerged, bringing to the fore disconcerting questions such as: What is heritage? As Waterton and Smith (2009: 12) argued, the answer might as well be that there is no such thing as heritage: "Rather, it exists as a range of competing discourses that have significant and powerful cultural and political consequences and uses." Before reaching this re-conceptualisation point – from heritage as a noun to heritage as a verb, as Harvey (2001) suggested –, let us present a brief pre-story.

The ways in which heritage was defined, understood, managed, and sedimented by the World Heritage Convention (UNESCO, 1972) in the time of (late) modernity are related to the vision of linear progress, the development of a risk society (Douglas, 1966; Beck, 1992), and the resulting need for governmentality, classification, and ordering; to the rise of nation-states and their "invented traditions" (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 1983); to accelerated globalisation, migrations and other transnational flows (and eventual reterritorialisation); to the technological modernisation of everyday life and the accompanying nostalgia for pre-modern "old- times" and "old- things" (and eventual retraditionalisation); and the growth of consumerism and the tourism industry. The concept was adopted and adapted by the larger public, as well as by a range of disciplines – from museology and conservation science, to other technical disciplines

concerned with the protection, preservation, restoration, and presentation of heritage, which recognise its potential for business and social engineering.

After the consolidation of the concept in public, administrative, and expert discourses in the 1970s, we can follow more critical reflections of the concept beyond essentialist understandings, according to which heritage is not "a thing" to be "discovered", but a process of evaluations, attitudes, and relations to the objects, practices, environments, and past events; it is formed in the present and reflects current concerns about the pasts with the aims to shape the future (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998; Harvey, 2001; Lowenthal, 2004; Hudales, Visočnik, 2005; Muršič, 2005; Smith, 2006; Bendix, 2009; Tschofen, 2012; Harrison, 2013; Fournier, 2021). Such an understanding does not diminish the importance of heritage for communities, groups, and individuals as "a highly significant dimension of political organisation and cultural life" (Whitehead et al., 2020b: 222). However, the questions to be asked are as follows: Why and under what circumstances is something recognised as heritage; who are the decision-makers, what are the premises of their decisions and argumentations (in connections with experts from different disciplines); who are the (representatives of) (heritage) communities to whom – following the recent heritage conventions[2] – the responsibility of identifying and preserving heritage is delegated; how are community voices recognised and included in, or excluded from the "authorised heritage discourse" (AHD) (Smith, 2006) or "official" (Harrison, 2013) heritage institutions such as registers, museums, public monuments and events; how "heritage dissonances" (Kisić, 2017) are negotiated; what are the implications of heritage-making at local, national and, in our case, macro-regional level – from economic to environmental impacts in the local community, the construction of different (national, macro- and micro-regional) identities, impacts on tourism flows and (cross-border) cooperation. In sum, following all these questions, one can conclude that heritage is a selective process.

Margins

As Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing argues, being at the margins is not an essential condition but the result of socio-cultural and power-political processes. People are marginalised as "their perspectives are cast to the side or excluded" (Lowenhaupt Tsing, 1993: 5). Marginality often refers to the experience of individuals or groups living outside the

[2] UNESCO's Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (UNESCO, 2003) that points out communities as key actors in heritage recognition (see Smith, Akagawa, 2009; Hafstein, 2018; Akagawa, Smith, 2019; Blake, Lixinski, 2020) and the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (so called Faro convention) (Council of Europe, 2005) that emphasizes the social and participatory aspects of heritage, encouraging communities and individuals to play active roles in defining, managing, and preserving their heritage (Zagato, 2015; Pinton, 2017).

dominant structures of power, privilege and cultural norms, and is usually theorized within a conceptual pair – centres vs. margins/peripheries – not in terms of sharply differentiated oppositions but as closely intertwined relationships (Green, 2005; Hannerz, 2015). Marginality and centrality are not to be conceptualized in opposition but as different "relative locations", determined by their connections to and separations from other spaces. Marginality as discussed by Sarah Green implies for example a difficult and ambivalent relevance to the heart of things and can become part of the heart of the things (Green, 2005; Green et al., 2024). The concept is used to analyse and understand the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion, inequality, and the interactions between dominant and subordinate groups. Their marginality can be captured in line with postcolonial and subaltern studies (Spivak, 1988; Bhabha, 1994; Bošković, 2008) by focusing on how power relations create "subaltern" groups who struggle to have their voices heard and their heritage recognised in dominant narratives. It is a dynamic, intersectional (i.e. overlapping of race, ethnicity, gender, class, language), and contested process that is shaped by historical, social, and political forces. Understanding margins in (critical) heritage studies means analysing how AHD is shaped and how it operates to create and maintain boundaries between what is and what is not heritage, but also how marginalised groups resist, negotiate meaning and create their "heritage from below" (Robertson, 2016).

Such complex entanglement between heritage and marginality has inspired and challenged the multidisciplinary research group Heritage on the Margins, whose members contributed to the establishment of the Association of Critical Heritage Studies' (ACHS) CEE chapter, organized its first conference, and put together this thematic issue. Throughout the process we aimed to provide "a view of heritage beyond the obvious, around corners and across obstacles", with a focus on "the performative influence of heritage on the margins – in minority, remote, linguistic, migrant, occupational and otherwise marginalized settings, […] heritage diglossia and the possibilities of undisciplined heritage" (Heriscope, 2022). Thinking from Central and Eastern European corners seems to be a privileged position for such an exercise.

Central and Eastern European perspectives

Thinking, locating, and framing Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) on contemporary mental maps of Europe is a difficult endeavour, as stressed by various researchers (e.g. Schenk, 2017). As Frithjof Benjamin Schenk (2017: 188) wrote, "mental maps depend both on geographical points of view and on competing regional concepts in different scholarly and political discourses." However, anthropological studies that focus on CEE, although often overlooked outside the region, are of value to understand also other places in Europe (Kojanić, 2020: 52) and their heritage-making processes.

The history of CEE has been replete with violent and perpetual changing of borders and routes ever since the First and Second World War, while the post-war events continue to shape everyday local realities, state formations, and the displacement of communities. (Self-)imposed views on the centrality and/or marginality of the region come strongly to the fore, creating an inherent diversity. Socialism and post-socialism can be understood as a unifying experience in the region, but they are also highly differentiated when considered alongside historical events and local political developments. How do all these different historical developments affect heritage-related processes in the region? What perspectives can be gained from Central and Eastern European heritage-making processes? (Heriscope, 2023). Such questions were discussed at the conference Critical Heritage Studies: Central European Perspectives (Prague, 6–7 October 2022), organized by the Institute of Ethnology at the Czech Academy of Sciences (Institute, 2022), which led to the aforementioned establishment of the CEE Chapter of ACHS, and in the following year to the organisation of its first conference.[3]

The title of the conference Heritage on the Margins? Central and Eastern Europe Perspectives puts the theme of marginality and centrality at the heart of discussion by exploring complex CEE geographies and histories at the entanglement of post-imperial and post-socialist legacies (Palaić, 2024). We raised the topics of "inter-imperiality" (Doyle, 2020), "internal colonialism" (Verdery, 1979), and legacies of the Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman empires (for example the forgotten, renamed, and reclaimed Ottoman heritage in Bulgaria; cf. Strahilov, Karakusheva, 2025); of the two world wars, displacements of people, changing borders and political regimes; of different legacies of (post-)socialism (for example the absence of workers in the Slovenian industrial heritage of socialism (Vodopivec, 2025), and the multiple layers and vigorousness of the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship around Ljubljana (Gregorač, 2025)); of marginalisation of (linguistic) minorities (for the case of the Sorbs in Lusatia, Germany; and the Vlachs in the Timok Valley, Serbia see Selvelli, 2025), as well as present and future heritage prospects (for the discussion on the current reception of the Soviet opera see Meašić, 2025; and for the entanglement of heritage and social innovation see Senčar Mrdaković, 2025).

Text written by Nina Vodopivec (this volume) discusses the absence of workers in industrial heritage in Slovenia and brings us into the context of post-socialist countries that often deny or blur their socialist past. And yet, this past exists in the experiences and stories of former industrial workers described by the author. Namely, the article points to the importance of (re)interpreting industrial heritage through the lens of workers' experiences. Industrial heritage is here presented as a potential site of value creation for the labour invested, where workers might regain their self-esteem.

[3] The conference was hosted by the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (ZRC SAZU) and co-organised by the Institute of Ethnology at the Czech Academy of Sciences in Ljubljana (29–30 November 2023) (see Heriscope, 2023; Fekonja, 2024).

Another complex and multilayered heritage-making process relates to the case study of the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship, a memorial trail in Ljubljana (Slovenia). Jernej Gregorač (this volume) explores through the elements of memory, materiality, and movement (that is, active engagement with the trail) how a memorial trail was created, curated, and used under socialism, and how its maintenance, use, and promotion persisted, changed in part, and were heritagized in post-socialism.

Ivo Strahilov and Slavka Karakusheva (this volume) bring us to the outskirts of the CEE and write about Bulgaria's Ottoman heritage beyond the authorised dissonance in the article 'Forgotten, Renamed, and Reclaimed'. In their research they explore the presence of the Ottoman heritage in Bulgaria, arguing that despite its exclusion from the national heritage canon, different communities engage with this past, they valorise and reclaim it. Using a scalar approach, authors examine how appropriations of the past operate at various levels, revealing the dynamic interplay of dominant and vernacular discourses. A comparative perspective on two CEE outskirts, that of the Sorbs in Germany and that of the Vlachs in Serbia, has been adopted by Guistina Selvelli (this volume). It identifies three dimensions of marginalization that precede the loss of ecoculturally diverse landscapes through the expansion of mining activities: linguistic difference, border proximity, and the element of rural culture. The article argues that these are part of larger processes that aim to legitimize "wastelanding" (Brynne Voyles, 2015), meaning the deliberate destruction of a minority (and its heritage) through environmental degradation.

The omnipresence of heritage (discourse) and its entanglement into community-based social innovation actions is examined by Marko Senčar Mrdaković (this volume). He presents the practice of autodrama, staged annually for over fifty years by the Teatro Povero di Monticchiello in rural Tuscany, on the outskirts of CEE. From the perspective of the local population, autodrama is acknowledged as a heritage, yet its social outcomes exhibit characteristics closer to social innovation, speaking of the fluidity and malleability of heritage.

In the last text written by Magdalena Marija Meašić (this volume), we are confronted with the question of how to stage Soviet operas in the 21st century. Namely, amid the Russo-Ukrainian war, the discussion on "Soviet" operas abroad acquired a new dimension. The parallel occurrences of boycotting Russian music and the resurgence of Soviet Russian music provoke questions about the power embodied by music and heritage, while also challenging the notion of music as detached from the current political turmoil. The complex persona of Sergey Prokofiev and his two "Soviet" operas are put at the forefront, linking easily with the discussion on marginality and centrality.

Several participants of the conference Heritage on the Margins? developed their conference papers into the here presented original scientific contributions, others only contributed with their ideas that importantly boosted the debates. Although not included here as authors, their names can be found in the conference booklet

(Rogelja Caf et al., 2023). Here presented conference contributions were joined by two other authors who responded to the editorial call. The result is not a "typical" CEE perspective on heritage but a bricolage of different viewpoints on the centres and outskirts of CEE geographies, a "crosslocation multigram", to use Green's et al. (2024) words, where participants may establish a common dialogue by recognizing a considerable number of topics to which they could relate, contribute, or learn from.

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Dediščina na obrobjih? Srednje- in vzhodnoevropske perspektive

Članek prinaša razmislek o procesih ustvarjanja dediščine v srednje- in vzhodnoevropskem kontekstu, o katerih se je razpravljalo na konferenci Dediščina na obrobjih? Srednje- in vzhodnoevropske perspektive, ki jo je novembra 2023 v Ljubljani organizirala večdisciplinarna raziskovalna skupina ZRC SAZU. Članek povezuje razprave in raziskave večdisciplinarnega raziskovalnega programa ZRC SAZU Dediščina na obrobjih: novi pogledi na dediščino in identiteto znotraj in onkraj nacionalnega z razpravami in študijami primerov, ki so bili predstavljeni na konferenci. Premislek o tvorjenju dediščine in performativni moči dediščine v manjšinskih, odročnih, jezikovnih, industrijskih, (post)imperijskih, (post) socialističnih in drugače marginaliziranih okoljih so narekovale raziskave v srednji in vzhodni Evropi in sosednjih deželah. Območje s številnimi notranjimi razlikami in prekrivanji je obetaven laboratorij za več vprašanj: Kako premišljati o sodobnih procesih ustvarjanja dediščine v dialogu s konceptualnim parom marginalnost-centralnost? Kaj lahko pridobimo, če k evropski dediščini in spominu pristopimo iz srednje- in vzhodnoevropske perspektive? Kateri so notranji robovi srednje in vzhodne Evrope? Odgovori, ki jih avtorici luščita iz prepleta teoretskih nastavkov in študij primerov, ne zarisujejo »tipičnega« srednje- in vzhodnoevropske(ga) (tvorjenja) dediščine, temveč so brikolaž (ne) povezanih, razcefranih in/ali prekrivajočih se pogledov na središča in obrobja. Gre za nekakšen »medlokacijski multigram« (Green idr., 2024), ki je udeležencem konference omogočil ustvariti dialog in prepoznati skupne teme.

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The Absence of Workers in Slovenian Industrial Heritage

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The article points at the importance of (re) interpreting industrial heritage through the lens of workers' experiences. After identifying difficulties in shaping industrial heritage in the context of post-socialist and post-industrial transformation, it examines industrial workers' experiences of the closure of the Mura garment factory. Industrial heritage is presented as a potential site of value creation for the labour invested, where workers could regain their self-esteem, social respect and recognition, and where their dispossession could be acknowledged.
▪ **Keywords**: industrial heritage, production workers, class, tacit knowledge, socialism/self-management, deindustrialization

Članek opozarja, da je industrijsko dediščino pomembno reinterpretirati skozi vidik delavskih izkušenj. Po opredelitvi težav pri oblikovanju industrijske dediščine v okviru postsocialistične in postindustrijske transformacije se avtorica osredini na delavske izkušnje ob zaprtju tovarne oblačil Mura. Industrijska dediščina je predstavljena kot potencialni prostor ponovnega vrednotenja vloženega dela v preteklosti, ki bi delavcem povrnilo samo- in družbeno spoštovanje. S tem bi tudi družbeno priznali njihovo razlastitev.
▪ **Ključne besede**: industrijska dediščina, proizvodno delavstvo, razred, tiho znanje, socializem/samoupravljanje, deindustrializacija

My first contact with industrial workers is connected with my internship in the textile department of the Technical Museum of Slovenia near Ljubljana. One day in 2000, when I was working at the museum, I received a call from a textile factory in Maribor that was to be closed down. A man asked me if the museum was interested in old machines. I already knew that Maribor had been called the Yugoslav Manchester in the past because of the traditional and intensive development of the textile industry since the 1920s. In the first decade of the post-socialist transition, Maribor was one of the cities most affected by deindustrialization, as the largest factories and employers were closed. So I went to Maribor, where I entered a production hall for the first time in my life and started talking to production and maintenance workers and managers. I was surprised by the enthusiasm and pride with which everybody spoke about "their" machines and "their factory" (Sln. *naša fabrka*). The factory they introduced me to was not only a place of technology and the production of goods, but above all a place of sociability, solidarity, hard work, and knowledge production. The encounter left its mark on me and influenced my future research, even if I did not know it at the time. I ended my visit to the factory by collecting not only the old machines, but also the workers' stories. Just before I left the Technical Museum, when my one-year contract expired, I set up an exhibition with production workers demonstrating the work on the

machines and talking about life in the factory. The aim of this exhibition was to show that production work is a social and not just a technical process (Vodopivec, 2000).

After Maribor, I visited several other textile factories in Slovenia. I changed jobs but continued my studies of the experiences and lives of industrial workers. I found that despite the many differences between the workers and factories, the workers shared an incredible enthusiasm for factory work. Some workers tried to show the size of the industrial halls, the power of the machines, and the wonder of production with their open hand gestures or posture. The affective industrial narrative of mastering technology in huge industrial halls and producing new goods conveyed power and pride (Mollona et al., 2009; Smith at al., 2011; Smith, Campbell, 2017; Strangleman, 2007, 2012, 2017). In the socialist, self-managed context, the production and management not only of technology and assembly lines, but also of factories, conveyed an even greater intensity. My interlocutors communicated much with their postures, fingers and hands, trying to encompass the industrial miracle that was part of Slovenia's socialist history. It took me some time to realise that they were communicating to me with their bodies, expressing, sharing the implicit knowledge they had acquired through years of sensory learning and production work in the factories. Their narratives about their work and past investments were not only about the past, but also about their present experiences of devaluation, they were a response to contemporary public misrepresentations.

What has troubled me most over the last 20 years[1] has been the enormous gap between the narratives of industrial workers, i.e. the way my interlocutors described their experiences of factory work and devaluation, and the way they were portrayed in the media (reports of factory closures in daily newspapers or on television), addressed or even dismissed and forgotten in public. This article is thus a response to contemporary misrepresentation, as it argues that former industrial workers do not yearn for a return to the past, but for recognition for their past hard work and commitment in the present. Industrial heritage is presented as a potential site of value creation for the labour invested, where workers can regain their self-esteem and social recognition. By exploring tacit knowledge and sensory learning, I present production work as active learning and full engagement. Such a perspective helps us to better understand production work in factories as it is based on the investment of knowledge, skills, and care. The perspective also allows us to explain the workers' attachments which materialised in the embodied connections that had the power to connect bodies, workers, machines, and factory walls.

[1] I conducted interviews with retired, dismissed, and still employed production workers, managers, directors and other professionals, including trade union representatives, working in textile factories all over Slovenia. I studied historical material: archives (minutes of workers' councils in two textile factories) and past media reports (daily newspapers, factory bulletins, critical magazines, film material) on the development of the textile industry and representations of textile workers and their transformation. In 2004 and 2005, I worked as part of a field study in the production hall of the Litija spinning mill.

I have been inspired by authors who pay attention to how the past is mobilized and used for the present and the future (Petrović, 2013, 2016; Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2011; Smith, Campbell, 2017), and who view memories and nostalgia as acts that "actively and self-consciously aim to use the past to contextualize the achievements and gains of present day living and working conditions, and to set a politically progressive agenda for the future" (Smith, Campbell, 2017: 613). Heritage is a process (Harvey, 2001; van de Port, Meyer, 2018) that should not be considered in isolation from class, economic, and social inequalities and power relations. This article therefore aims to contribute to research that questions the exclusion or misrepresentation of industrial workers in shaping cultural heritage (Berger, Wicke, 2017; Matošević, 2011; Petrović, 2013, 2016; Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2011; Smith, Campbell, 2011, 2017). It points to a strong claim to self-esteem and legitimacy that industrial workers' narratives bring forth. It considers the political and social significance of heritage formation, which builds on explicit claims of political legitimacy in a pragmatic politics of recognition (Fraser, 2005; Smith, Campbell, 2011, 2017).

In the first part of the article, I link the representations of industrial workers to the post-industrial and post-socialist paradigm that defines industrial heritage in Slovenia. The section draws on comparative studies of industrial workers' experiences, deindustrialization and industrial heritage making in the West, but also recalls the experiences of socialism and self-management in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. The second section uses a case study of the Mura garment factory, which closed in 2009, to show how industrial heritage making can respond to experiences of deindustrialization and dispossession. This idea is further developed in the third section, where tacit knowledge in production is explored in order to present the factory as a site of knowledge production.

Industrial heritage in Slovenia

The oral historian Alessandro Portelli wrote that there are few songs about deindustrialization in Italy, in contrast to the United States, where such and other kinds of cultural production abound. In Italy, he argued, there was not much talk about the loss of industrial workers in public, cultural and academic circles because society viewed industrial workers as political-ideological constructs rather than persons (Portelli, 2005).

I found a similar situation in Slovenia: Industrial workers were treated as remnants of the socialist past and thus as the ideological Other. The socio-political attitude towards them was shaped by the prevailing attitude towards socialism (and Yugoslavia), which was characterised by political instrumentalization and a retrospective economic evaluation that saw socialism as a failure. The transition from industrialism

to post-industrialism in Slovenia, as in other post-socialist countries, ran parallel to the transition from socialism to capitalism. Production workers as ideological figures and symbols of the value of labour in socialism disappeared from public space, they became silent political subjects with no means to articulate their demands (Petrović, 2013). Moreover, their demands were dismissed as nostalgia, which prevented them from "moving forward" and transforming themselves into employable, self-acting, entrepreneurial and self-responsible subjects (Vodopivec, 2021a). Nostalgization of industrial workers was an integral part of contemporary modernization, post-socialist and neoliberal cultural othering (Boyer, 2010; Lankauskas, 2016; Senjković, 2021), which constituted industrial workers in opposition to the modern, future-oriented entrepreneurs.

In post-socialist countries, nostalgization, historicism and non-modernity of industrial labour is linked to the socialist past, but authors in capitalist countries also write about similar representations that symbolically impoverish industrial workers (Clarke, 2015; Haylett, 2001; Munt, 2000; Russo, Lee Linkon, 2005; Skeggs, 1994, 2005). They point to the disappearance of class and labour from the research. Similar situation is noted in the field of heritage studies. Comparative heritage studies show that the development of industrial heritage is (also) in the West tightly linked to politics and capital (Berger, Wicke, 2017; Blackmar, 2001; Petrović, 2013, 2016; Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2011; Smith, Campbell, 2017). It was easier to create industrial heritage where economic restructuring was perceived as successful, for example in the Ruhr[2] area as opposed to Dortmund and Glasgow (Berger et al., 2017; Richter, 2017). In addition to the economic aspects, the authors point at the politics towards industrial culture and class. The American philosopher Nancy Fraser explained the disappearance of class from political and public discourse in the West and East with the transition from the socialist imaginary of economic redistribution to the political imaginary of national identities. After 1989, post-socialist politics was primarily about ethnic culture and national identity, not poverty and economic exclusion. Identity politics displaced the concept of class (1997, 2005).

In Slovenia, for similar reasons (see also Petrović, 2013), including the aforementioned attitude towards the socialist context that shaped industrial work, there was no interest among scholars to study industrial workers' experiences 20 years ago. In the last decade, the topic has gained some attention (Černelič Krošelj et al., 2011; Kosmos, 2020a, 2020b; Kosmos et al., 2020; Oder, 2015; Petrović, 2013, 2016), especially more recently among the younger generations of students, who are often themselves connected to factories through family members or the local environment. The situation

[2] Authors however point to the problematic touristification and depolitization of labour in the Ruhr area, industrial heritage serves above all to the identity making of the middle class and lacks critical stance (Berger et al., 2017).

is gradually changing among the cultural producers[3] and in local[4] and regional museums. However, the question remains who gets to play part in industrial heritage formation and how the account is presented.

Andrea Matošević (2011) in his research on industrial heritage in the Labin area (Croatia), and Tanja Petrović (2013, 2016) in the study on museumization of Yugoslav experience rightly noted that longtime production workers, the protagonists of the socialist industrialism, remained absent from museums. Public representations preferably focused on the stories of successful entrepreneurs from before the Second World War or on products, brands which justified the continuity between past, present, and future (see also Vodopivec, 2021a).

In a critical reflection, Tanja Petrović (2013, 2016) dealt with the absence of socialist industrial experiences in the studies on industrial heritage in Europe. She referred to Kerstin Barndt's (2010) critique of the reduction of industrial experiences to archaeological sites that show the natural cycle from the birth to the death of industry. Such a linear representation reduces the experience of industrialism to a purely "natural" evolutionary step in the development of capitalism, which erases the experiences of the working class. Apart from the problematic representation, the socialist industrial experience does not fit into such a framework, as Europe could not accept socialism as part of its historical legacy. Petrović opposed the exclusion of the socialist experience from the industrial heritage in Europe and the exclusion of industrial socialist modernization from the cultural heritage in Slovenia. She also critically emphasised that linearization erases the affect of (socialist) industrial modernity, social protests and conflicts, as the discourses on cultural heritage strive to detach themselves from the current political processes.

It was precisely this absence of the socialist industrial experience and detachment from the current social conflicts in cultural heritage discourses that also influenced my work. When I had a chance to organize a bike tour through the industrial ruins in Ljubljana, my aim was to challenge that.[5] About 50 people participated in the tour, and together we cycled and discussed the importance of socialist industrial experiences for

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[3] A play in Maribor, *Was ist Maribor* in 2012, problematized deindustrialization in the city; the play *Paloma* in 2020 questioned the consequences of postindustrialism in the town built by the sanitary paper factor; and *Ahti Šiht* in 2014, a play by the Theatre of Work (a youth group, Sln. Gledališče Dela), dealt with how the youth experience the post-industrial changes in the industrial and working-class community of Ravne na Koroškem (Vodopivec, 2021a).

[4] In Kamnik, curator Marko Kumer from the local museum (Medobčinski Muzej Kamnik) devotes special attention to the experiences of industrial workers. Together with the cultural producer Goran Završnik, they are organizing several actions that call for more attention and a revaluation of the abandoned industrial sites.

[5] I was invited by RogLab (initiated by the European project Second Chance) to organize the tour in 2014, which I prepared together with Sonja Ifko, professor at the Faculty of Architecture. The tour was part of the Goodbye Factory (Sln. Adijo, Tovarna) action initiated by the newspaper *Delo* and the reporter Mojca Zabukovec, with whom I also collaborated (Zabukovec, 2014). As part of the campaign, stories from workers about various factories in Ljubljana were collected and published, and an exhibition was organized at the City Museum.

the construction of modernity that forms an essential part of our lives today. My idea was to draw attention to factories as sites of workers' efforts, struggles, and knowledge production while problematizing their contemporary representations, the political disorganisation of the working class, the dismantling of workers' rights and precarization in the present. Rather than aiming for a neutral representation of industrial heritage, I have argued that talking about industrial workers and labour has, and should have, a social and political meaning.

Studies on deindustrialization from the West show that deindustrialization is a process which needs a temporal distance (Strangleman et al., 2013). Three decades after the factories closed, former industrial communities in Europe and the United States are still struggling because deindustrialization is not over. Sherry Lee Linkon described the deindustrialization in Youngstown, the former steel town in Ohio where 50,000 people lost their jobs after the factories closed in 1978, as "radioactive waste". The effects of the radiation can still be felt long after the factory has closed, even though the workers have already found new jobs. The traces of industrialization are visible in the city's landscape, in people's memories, aspirations, ideas and values (Lee Linkon, 2018). Studies on deindustrialization show that the "industrial structure of feeling" – the feelings that constructed "ways of life" (during the industrial period), the way of doing things, the sense of not only personal but also collective identity – has survived beyond industrialism (Byrne, 2002). Deindustrialization, then, is not an event, but an ongoing process that affects the present and the future, including larger local communities or regions.

However, the transition of industry to a new identity as "heritage" is a complex and difficult process (Smith, Campbell, 2017). A curator of a US museum told Laurajane Smith and Gary Campbell in the 1980s that he felt like the undertaker when he was transforming an old industrial site into a heritage site (Smith, Campbell, 2017). Such a transformation is underpinned by loss and grief, especially in places where the sense of belonging and industrial workers' subjectivity is still very much alive and present (Smith, Campbell, 2011, 2017).

In many places in Slovenia, these processes have yet another dimension: the bankruptcy proceedings have not been completed, there are hardly any alternative options, no new identifications (see also Petrović, 2013, 2016). The socialist industrial experience still functions as an experience of loss and, above all, of dispossession that occurred through privatization during the post-socialist transformation. I address the concept of dispossession, which comes from Marxist literature and claims that capitalism can only function (accumulate) through the dispossession of the other (Harvey, 2003; Kasmir, Carbonella, 2008, 2014). If we apply the concept to the post-socialist transition, we see that privatization (after the Enterprise Act in Slovenia in 1988/89, especially in the 1990s) and capital accumulation came about through the dispossession of working people (especially the industrial working class), through privatization and the demolition of what

they had built through the self-management system. Deindustrialization was thus not a politically neutral process, industrial restructuring was part of the disorganization of the working class (cultural and political disorganization), it was a violent act that led to (material and symbolic) impoverishment and social suffering (Vodopivec, 2021a, 2022). Dispossession did not only capture the withdrawal of labour rights, welfare arrangements, job security, the devaluation of industrial workers and their labour, "wild privatizations", management takeovers and the exhaustion of companies that ended in bankruptcy and left workers on the streets, but it also tore apart the means of social reproduction, and such an act was not socially or politically recognized as such (Vodopivec, 2021a).

A comparative perspective in recognizing similarities between the socialist and capitalist projects of industrialization and deindustrialization is important. In different parts of the world, experiences of industrialism are about pride, agency, belonging, achievement, solidarity and camaraderie but also hard work and exploitation, about building modernity and a better life (Barndt, 2010; Bonfiglioli, 2020; Byrne, 2002; Clarke, 2015; Hann, Parry, 2018; Kosmos et al., 2020; Kwon, 2015; Mollona et al., 2009; Petrović, 2013, 2016; Russo, Lee Linkon, 2005; Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2011; Smith, Campbell, 2017). Nevertheless, we should not neglect the nuances arising from the respective historical contexts, since production workers had in socialism, in particular in the self-management in Yugoslavia, an even more significant role to play in industrial modernization than in the capitalist West (Petrović, 2013; Vodopivec, 2021a).

Socialist ideology constituted the true value of labour in production which was the base for building social and public services. The production workers in self-management were building "their factories", as well as social standards and local community infrastructures (Bonfiglioli, 2020; Musić, 2021; Vodopivec, 2021a). Although workers in production had no executive power in the factory (despite the proclaimed workers' self-management), they were normatively recognized as the key actors whose work and professional opinion mattered and could be articulated to some extent (Archer, Musić, 2017; Vodopivec, 2020), and who were involved in the distribution of profit and wealth. The latter was rarely the case in practice, yet the right to the distribution of wealth remained part of the workers' moral economy to which they were entitled. The particular experience of self-management also involved participation in the construction of modernity outside the factories, and indeed much of the local infrastructure (including kindergartens, schools, and medical centres) was built with "voluntary" contributions from the population, whether in the form of labour or finances (taxes), including self-imposed contributions (Duda, 2023; Kladnik, 2022; Piškurić, 2022). The privatization of socially owned enterprises and infrastructures co-created by workers was therefore experienced all the more intensely as dispossession.

In the next section, I will use the case of the closure of the Mura garment factory, which I followed immediately after its collapse, to show how industrial heritage could respond to the experience of deindustrialization and dispossession.

Mura Garment Factory (1925–2009)

The collapse of Mura in 2009, which left 2635 people unemployed, affected the entire Prekmurje region, a region that was already economically devastated before the financial crisis. Based on my studies on the experience of the closure (Vodopivec, 2021a), I argue that for the people who had worked in the factory for years, as well as for their family members, their predecessors, the closure was a traumatic experience that affected not only their professional identity but also their personality. Despite a very long process of psychological and physical exhaustion, the bankruptcy was experienced as a shock, a powerful and traumatic event. The sudden loss of the factory and the job meant not only a financial loss, but also a social loss, a complete social disintegration and disorientation; the employees lost their self-esteem and social respect. I argue that the inability to articulate the shock after the bankruptcy due to paralysis, accompanied by shame due to humiliation and fear, was followed by the non-acceptance of such feelings in the wider society. Workers were not allowed to grieve publicly, as they were urged in the public to "move on" and change their professional and personal selves in the labour market. The social conflict was not acknowledged and the emotional reactions, the calls against fraud and dispossession, were dismissed as nostalgia preventing people from moving on (Vodopivec, 2022).

Mura's story was not surprising for global capitalism; it even seemed inevitable, since such a large labour-intensive enterprise did not fit into the framework of the modern economy. However, this "naturalization" concealed the material, symbolic, and physical dispossession of workers, including the fact that bankruptcy took place in a very problematic way (Vodopivec, 2021a). As I have noted, it matters how the story of a factory closure is told. Linear narratives naturalize the industrial landscape and disregard the grievances and demands of workers (Clarke, 2015). This was also highlighted by Jackie Clarke in her study of the Moulinex bankruptcy in France. She has shown how the public treatment of workers' grief and nostalgia as pathologizing and an obstacle to progress obscures the manifestation of social conflict (2015). She presented the struggle for justice after bankruptcy as a struggle against the interpretation that portrayed the factory's collapse as "an inevitable result of impersonal historical forces and positioned those most affected by it as part of the past" (Clarke, 2015).

After the closure of Mura I came across similar efforts, but they lacked public support. My interlocutors pointed to the need to articulate dispossession and fraud, they demanded recognition of their work, their knowledge, their past investments and their importance in society. Their narratives expressed both social conflict and the need to actively grieve and acknowledge loss. The loss was not publicly recognized as dispossession, although it should have been. It was political (withdrawal of workers' rights during the post-socialist transition), material (impoverishment), social (loss of social recognition), symbolic (devaluation), and physical dispossession. The latter included

both physical injuries from working in industry and the psychophysical consequences of bankruptcy or the so-called restructuring of industry (Vodopivec, 2021a, 2021b), as well as the violent dissolution that severed the attachments between people and their environment. Such attachments, which my interlocutors strongly emphasized, should be taken seriously in our research and considered in their materialized form, as also pointed out by Jong Ben Kwon (2015), who studied the embodied connections created by proximity and duration between people, machines, tools, and materials in the Korean automotive industry. His study revealed that the violent dissolution of these attachments due to bankruptcy meant not only the loss of the supportive environment and surroundings for the individual, but also the actual loss of the self, as the industrial workers' selves were created through attachment to the machines and factories.

I consider industrial heritage as a site where such material attachments can be represented and the act of violent detachment and dispossession can be recognized. I follow Smith and Campbell who argue that acknowledging fraud and dispossession is as important as recognizing the past investment (Smith, Campbell, 2017), knowledge, skills, and hard work of workers. Heritage making has political implications and can affirm identity and self-recognition, provide a sense of belonging and esteem, and reclaim self-respect and social respect (see also Smith, Campbell, 2011, 2017). This aspect of industrial heritage making is extremely important as I found that dispossession of social respect and self-esteem affected my interlocutors the hardest. They described feeling like *"garbage"*, a *"dirty carpet"* or *"a zero"*. Respectability (Skeggs, 2005) was highly associated with their work, especially for the generation of women I spoke to in Mura.

In contexts where individuals and communities have been socially and economically marginalized, self-esteem becomes a powerful demand that seeks political recognition (Sayer, 2005 quoted in Smith, Campbell, 2011). Moral concerns should be taken seriously as a sense of injustice underpins class struggles and also urban and regional redefinitions in post-industrial times. The closure of factories where the majority of the urban or regional population was employed is closely related to the loss of infrastructure, the social fabric and structure, the out-migration of people, especially young people, and the search for a new urban or regional identity.

Murska Sobota, the town where the large Mura plant was located, does not quite correspond to the image of a former typical socialist industrial town, as it is a small town in the middle of a rural area. During socialism, the Prekmurje region was only gradually industrialised, and the infrastructure built up (Lorenčič, 2020). The Mura clothing factory was of crucial importance in this process. The importance of the factory lay not only in the organisation and structuring of the workers' lives (different generations and several members of the same family were employed), but also in the wider community. With the construction of road infrastructure and the development of bus transportation, the factory penetrated even deeper into rural areas, as people who lived on farms found work in the factory. Despite the scattered lives of the semi-proletariat,

socialist industrial modernization strongly shaped people's identity and expectations, as working in industry was directly linked to creating a modern future and raising living standards.

At this point, the gender dimension should also be considered, as the majority of production workers in the textile industry were women (80% in Mura). Employment in socialism became the norm and normality for women, and women's work experiences were strongly associated with agency, emancipation, and autonomy (Bonfiglioli, 2020; Vodopivec, 2021a). Women workers' insistence on hard work, harsh conditions and their active participation should therefore be taken seriously and analysed in a specific historical context; living and working conditions were improved only gradually and with the active participation of women workers. As mentioned above, the workers' participation in the self-management system went beyond the factory walls, and the efforts and life in the factory were closely intertwined with the local communities and the region.

The collapse of Mura was therefore not only associated with the loss of jobs by my interlocutors, *"it was about the loss of the factory"*, as a former fashion designer emphasized in a 2019 interview. She said:

> *Mura was not just about producing high-quality clothing. We had... what we had! We had our own clinic, our own dentist. Everything was in the courtyard of Mura, everything was there. Apartment blocks were built, associations organized, for culture, sports. Everyone benefited from it.*[6]

After the 1960s, Mura built 700 apartments for its employees and gave loans to workers for 1,700 individual buildings. The company subsidized meals for workers, built a health clinic, financed cultural and sports halls, partly two kindergartens, and built transportation infrastructure after opening new plants in the countryside (as did other factories). Mura was considered a giant of the garment industry in terms of the number of employees, and its reputation extended beyond the borders of Slovenia and the former Yugoslavia. For the people of the region, Mura embodied industrial (socialist) modernity (Vodopivec, 2021a).

The economist Suzana, who worked in Mura, repeated several times, with open hands and an upright posture, that *"Mura was synonymous with progress and development"*. She spoke with pride of the modernity that the factory has brought to the region and beyond, as well as the knowledge it has developed *"not only in production, but also in design, science, information technology, advertising and marketing"*. Suzana contacted me on her own initiative when she heard that I was talking to laid-off production workers. She told me that she wanted to pass on *"the legacy of Mura"*, which she had

[6] Fashion designer, interview, Murska Sobota, 2019.

"helped to create". She wanted to contribute to and participate in the creation of Mura's legacy by presenting the factory as a place of knowledge production and a driver of progress and modernity in the region. She wanted to fight against oblivion, but also to participate in industrial heritage formation. I have identified various people and actors who have asserted this right and claim. The question of who can be involved in the process of shaping heritage and how the heritage is presented is crucial.

One of the actors in shaping the Mura heritage in the region was the Pomurski Muzej, a regional museum in Murska Sobota. During the European Capital of Culture Maribor 2012, the museum, together with several other museums in eastern Slovenia, developed a joint work project titled Wow, Industry! However, the exhibition about Mura, titled *Mura Open* (Fujs, Ščančar, 2012), was not primarily about the production workers in the Mura factory but about fashion creations and brands. Mura was very well known for its fashion designs. Parallel to the exhibition, a documentary film was made in which retired older production workers talked about their work experiences (Pšajd, 2012). The curator who prepared the exhibition later told me that the production workers were disappointed with its design, because they felt excluded.

Most of the people I spoke to did not mention the exhibition, only one of them said she wished the whole event had focused more on *"the factory as such"*. Before I spoke to the curator, my own interpretation of the exhibition design was that the focus on successful brands fits well with current hegemonic discourses and the modern economy. However, I later learned in conversation with her that the exhibition, which could not be realised as planned, was created as a response to public discourses that portrayed the Mura factory only as an employer, as a social provider in the region. The aim of the exhibition was to challenge this portrayal and present the factory as a place of innovation, creativity and knowledge production. The curator, who prepared the exhibition together with a fashion designer, built up Mura's legacy in knowledge production in the field of fashion design. The presentation of a socialist company as a modern enterprise built on knowledge, development, innovation, marketing, informatics, advertising, and fashion design was intended to debunk the prevailing image of a socialist factory, especially in the textile sector, as a place with poor technology and manual, repetitive operational work. This got me thinking about how the creation of industrial heritage needs to be read in specific socio-political contexts, as these play an important role.

On the other hand, as the case shows, the creation of heritage is full of struggles over which histories matter – factory, design, knowledge, production labour – and who belongs to the collective: fashion designers, managers or production workers or other local inhabitants, who is included and who is excluded. Class plays an important role in such heritagization processes (Byrne, 1991 quoted in van de Port, Meyer, 2018; Smith, Campbell, 2011, 2017). Heritage creation is about belonging and selection, which always depends on which communities we, the creators of industrial heritage,

have in mind or who we consider as a community. Heritage formation also depends on who is speaking: professionals, the state, international professional communities (authorised heritage discourses), NGOs, activists, or ordinary people from different communities (Fakin Bajec, 2020a, 2020b; Habinc, 2020; Petrović, 2016; Smith, 2006; Smith et al., 2011).

Based on my studies, I posit that knowledge production could be a common denominator linking the experiences of the different classes in heritagization, since it was emphasised by all of them. Not only fashion designers claimed their knowledge for themselves, but also production workers. However, the professionalism and knowledge they claimed for themselves was not based on professional qualifications and formal education, but on the embodied knowledge they had in their muscles, fingers, noses, ears. In the next section, I will show that production work, as represented by production workers, is not simply to be understood as a motorised, operational and repetitive activity, but as active learning full of worker engagement.

Tacit knowledge

Looking at the photo of Mura's production facility, we see women sitting behind their machines, bent bodies in the production halls. Sewing was a sitting job, women could not leave their positions, they were constantly pressured by the speed of machines and norms. They only moved away from the machine when they were fetching the required material, taking a break or helping their colleagues. Such organization of labour in industry generated many injuries and illnesses (Vodopivec, 2021b).

In socialism, too, the organization of work in production was based on strict hierarchies, discipline, and on the piece work system – the *norma*. It was determined individually how many pieces or how much one had to produce per hour/day, and the wage depended on it. There was a constant pressure that forced the workers to work faster. Narratives about *norma* are narratives about fear, speed and anxiety, but also autonomy and professionalism, as most workers considered that one was paid according to the work invested.[7] The worker was much dependent on how well the machine worked, how the material ran, and how workers before them prepared the goods. At the same time, a worker also operated the machine with her knowledge, skills, body, and her experience.

The assembly line created frustration and antagonism among workers, since one was dependent on other workers on the line, there was competition yet also interdependence that made all workers indispensable and created a coherent unit. Stories about the

[7] Not all of them, however, because it was easier to meet the *norma* in some workplaces than in others, and assignment to workplaces depended on the foreman.

work behind a machine in production are stories about cooperation, pride and power, fear and frustration, skill, ingenuity and mutual care: the workers took care of their machines, just as the machines took care of them; not hurting their fingers, bringing them bread – achieving the expected *norma*. If the machines *"ran well"* (Sln. *je dobro laufala*), a worker earned more money. The relationship between the worker and the machine was experienced reciprocally. The machine was not a dead thing; my interlocutors were in relationships with them. Such experiences oppose the thesis of final alienation. "The law of irreducibility of skills" (Sigaut quoted in Ingold, 2000: 19) points to the constant adaptation and redefinition of skills that are an integral part of workers' attitudes towards technological innovation. As I found out during my ethnographic work in the still-operating Predilnica Litija spinning mill in 2004 and 2005,[8] the experience of working with a machine remained fundamental in maintaining the position of an experienced production worker, despite the restructuring and the new management strategies that privileged formal education. Working behind machines required particular skills, physical reactions, postures, sensory abilities and attention.

When I visited older, retired workers at home, they communicated work processes with their hands and body postures, and linked the movements with many descriptions as *"here"*, *"there"*, *"up"*, *"down"*, *"like this and then like this"*. Much remained verbally inarticulate in the interviews. It was only when I entered the Predilnica Litija production I understood what the former spinners meant. I also understood why the textile workers communicated their work with their hands and not verbally. The work in production is done with the body, and learning did not take place through conversation or verbal expression, but through experiential learning, imitation and repetition, through practice and learning sensory-perceived meanings.

"You needed time to ...", said Marjana from the Mura factory, complementing the words by rubbing her fingertips together. In the garment industry, the sense of touch is very important, the sensitivity that the worker has acquired through years of experience is the knowledge in the fingertips. The sense of touch absorbed the pressure of the body, the working environment and the tools. Lizika told me that she felt under her fingers whether the fabric was flowing well or whether it needed to be stretched, moistened, turned so that the edges were not visible. Although the work could be repeated countless times, it was not exactly the same, because the environment changed, the working conditions changed due to different types of material, humidity and air temperature, etc., which required improvisation and adaptation. In the same manner, the voice of the machine in production is not to be understood only as an obstacle ruining hearing and communication, but also as information that the work process ran correctly. This required not only hearing but listening that was learned over time. The same went with

[8] Part of my fieldwork experience involved working on the production floor of the Litija spinning mill (2004–2005) which provided me with valuable insights into the embodied dimensions of labour.

the sense of smell. Ana said[9] how she learned to recognize different materials by smell: *"The technologist taught me how the material smells, how the cotton smells, how the silk smells. After I learned, when I went to the warehouse I just followed my nose."*

The sensory understanding of skills and work indicates that production work can be understood not only as the obedient, motorized execution of learned activities, but also as active learning that took place in contact with machines, tools, materials, the environment and people. The sensory aspect of production involved observing the environment, recognizing information and processing it (see also Ingold, 2000). As people entered production, they learned to observe and perceive the signs in the environment, interpret them, make sense of them and react to them. Sensory knowledge involves the concentrated observation or perception of the environment based on training through sensory practices. These processes often remained unreflected. Production work involved physical activity, which eventually became a habit, but physical activity should not be seen as opposed to mental work but in conjunction with it (Vodopivec, 2021a).

The sensual and physically intense perceptions had the power to connect. The workers "tuned in" to their working environment, their tools and machines (Ingold, 2004). This attunement involved synchronized action in which they entered into the same experiential flow of the assembly line. Jong Ben Kwon drew on the concept of entrainment (Game, 2001 quoted in Kwon, 2015) to emphasize the reciprocal experience of the assembly line in a Korean automotive workshop. He described how through vibration and rhythm, movements or bodily skills were learned and connections between humans and non-humans were established and embodied. He emphasized the bodily incorporation of these connections (Kwon, 2015).

A concept of embodiment (Csordas, 1994, 2009) that calls for the body to be seen not only as a result of disciplinary regimes, but as a subject and lived experience, helps us to better understand the work experience and professional knowledge that emerges through engagement with the environment, in contact with machines, tools, materials and people. This means that when the body was trained, it changed. After twenty or even thirty years of almost daily work in the factory, the rhythm of the assembly line and the factory itself had become an integral part of the workers' bodies and selves. Such an analytical perspective helped me to understand the bodily metaphors used by my interlocutors by taking them literally; e.g. Ana, who started working at the age of 17 (like most of my interlocutors), said: *"I grew up behind the machine, in the factory. The factory is in my blood."* Or Silva: *"The factory gets under your skin"*, or other physical metaphors used by my interlocutors such as *"we breathed with the factory"*, *"the factory becomes a part of you."* Most of my interlocutors got a job in production

[9] The interview was conducted in 2013 by Nina Luin, a student of cultural studies, as part of her Master's thesis; Luin kindly shared her interviews with me. All other interviews quoted in the article were conducted by me.

at a young age, they developed physically and personally with the machine. These attachments that occurred over time changed them physically and psychologically.

Attachments were established through workers' investment as they put their bodies, knowledge, care and energy into the work. Their physical and emotional investment (in work) created new values, expectations and relationships based on reciprocity. These values were not only functional and related to products, but also emotional and social. They created specific bonds. Such a view contributes to a deeper understanding of factory work narratives based on engagement, care, and exchange. Exchange, which in this context means not only the exchange of labour for money, but also of knowledge, experience, views, skills, time and energy, and also mutual help and cooperation, was constitutive of social relations. Socialist paternalism is often portrayed as a factory and the state taking care of the workers, but my interlocutors understood their relationship to the factory as an intersubjectively constructed one, as the workers also took care of *"their factories"*, *"their products"*, *"their machines"* and *"their employees"*. Narratives about *"our factory"* embody such relationships of commitments and care, a sense of belonging, entitlement and rights.

Conclusion

The article explores how heritage can respond to misinterpretations of industrial workers' grievances, their experiences of dispossession, and their claims to regain social and self-respect. A case study of the experience of the closure of the Mura garment factory is presented. The article argues that the exhibition, which built on the knowledge of Mura's fashion designers to deconstruct the dominant problematic representations of socialist factories, could be extended to the knowledge of production workers that remains hidden in the body. By exploring tacit knowledge and sensory learning, production work is represented as active learning and full engagement. Such a perspective helps us to better understand production work in factories as based on the investment of knowledge, skills, and care. The perspective also allows us to explain workers' attachment, which materialised in the embodied bonds that had the power to connect bodies, workers, machines, and factory walls.

The article argues that industrial heritage formation could serve as a potential site of value creation for invested labour, where workers can regain their sense of self-worth and social recognition, and where their earlier commitment, care, and investment are recognised as much as their later dispossessions.

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Odsotnost delavcev v slovenski industrijski dediščini

Članek temelji na dolgotrajni etnografski raziskavi izkušenj dela proizvodnih delavk in delavcev ter deindustrializacije v Sloveniji. Namen avtorice je raziskati, kako lahko dediščina odgovarja na problematične interpretacije industrijskega delavstva v družbi, na njihove klice proti razlastitvi ter zahteve po povrnitvi družbenega in samospoštovanja. V prvem delu so obravnavane težave oblikovanja industrijske dediščine v kontekstu postsocialistične in postindustrijske

transformacije. Sledi poglavje o izkušnjah industrijskih delavk in delavcev ob zaprtju tovarne oblačil Mura. Z raziskavo tihega znanja in čutnega učenja je proizvodno delo v zadnjem razdelku predstavljeno kot aktivno učenje in sodelovanje. Slednje pomaga bolje razumeti poudarke v pripovedih ljudi, vključno s pomenom tovarniškega proizvodnega dela. Ta se je ustvarjal desetletja z napori ljudi – z vloženim znanjem, spretnostmi in skrbmi. Navezanost ljudi na tovarno gre tako v raziskavah obravnavati resno, saj se je materializirala v utelešenih povezavah med telesi, stroji in tovarniškimi stenami.

Industrijska dediščina je v članku predstavljena kot potencialni prostor, kjer lahko preteklemu delu proizvodnega delavstva povrnemo vrednost, delavkam in delavcem pa družbeno spoštovanje ter samospoštovanje. Dediščina bi tako priznala tudi razlastitev industrijskega delavstva.

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Marching on Memory: Heritage of the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship in Ljubljana

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The paper presents the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship, a memorial trail in Ljubljana, Slovenia, and through the elements of memory, materiality, and movement on the trail explores how certain memorials were created and curated in Slovenia under socialism, and how they are maintained and promoted as heritage in contemporary times. By combining theory on memorials in heritage studies with active engagement with the trail, the paper addresses our relationship with heritage as a multi-layered and dynamic process.
▪ **Keywords**: heritage, memorial, Second World War, socialism, Slovenia

Članek z elementi spomina, materialnosti in gibanja predstavi spominsko pot, Pot spominov in tovarištva, v Ljubljani, in s tem razgrinja pogled na to, kako so se v času socializma v Sloveniji ustvarjali spominski prostori in kako se ti prostori danes še ohranjajo in uveljavljajo kot dediščina. S kombinacijo teorije o spomenikih in aktivnega udejstvovanja na poti obravnava tudi naš odnos do dediščine kot večplastnega in dinamičnega procesa.
▪ **Ključne besede**: dediščina, spomenik, druga svetovna vojna, socializem, Slovenija

Introduction

The Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship (Sln. Pot Spominov in Tovarištva, PST) is a 33 kilometres long memorial trail that fully encircles the city of Ljubljana. Primarily it is a space dedicated to the memory of the traumatic experience of Ljubljana's occupation in the Second World War, when the city was completely enclosed by a barbed wire fence. Today, the trail is an important part of both the tangible and intangible heritage of the city, as it is also a place of a yearly commemorative march that celebrates the city's liberation in May 1945.

Besides possessing a strong memorial value, the trail has over the years developed to become a widely used public surface and one of the bigger recreational and green areas of the city. As such, the trail is a good case study of how to create, manage, and adapt heritage spaces in urban settings, while its story also offers an insight into the planning, management, and designation of heritage spaces in post-war socialist Slovenia and Yugoslavia.

The paper presents the case study of this memorial landscape as a part of the city's heritage and connects it to similar discussions in heritage studies. Its research focus is to present it through the elements of memory, materiality, and movement. Through this analysis, I plan to observe and discuss the ways in which the memory of traumatic

experiences can be physically preserved and constructed in an urban setting, how the trail itself was developed as a part of the city's heritage, and how heritage spaces can be perceived outside of their designated contexts.

The major questions of my research inquire how the memory of the Second World War was preserved and managed as heritage in a socialist Slovenian society, and how it has transitioned to contemporary times where individual memories of the events were replaced with more "curated" narratives of past events. Secondly, I also plan to look at the trail through the lenses of past–present, materiality–intangibility, and urban development–green spaces, and see whether heritage spaces can be successfully observed through all these three perspectives, and what such observation can tell us about the preservation of memories that impacted larger areas as heritage. Finally, my plan was also to observe how the trail manifests itself as part of the city outside of the official heritage narratives, and what we can learn from this when discussing heritage in contemporary contexts.

For this, I will firstly address the origins of the trail and place it into the wider narratives of war memorials. Secondly, I will address the trail in the context of the city's and the country's socialist heritage and discuss how the heritage and experience of Yugoslav/Slovenian socialism influenced its creation and designation as a monument. Finally, on the example of the trail, I plan to reflect on the positioning of heritage in contemporary settings, especially on its relationship to urban landscape, natural environment, and movement.

Methodology and sources

The following paper is based on the research for my unpublished Master's thesis on the same subject at the Sustainable Heritage Management programme at the Aarhus University in 2020. The methods and sources used for it were very diverse and cover a wide array of different approaches and elements, although they are firmly footed in the sphere of heritage studies.

In relation to the historical background of the Second World War in Ljubljana, I relied primarily on Kranjc (2015), who researched the Slovenian experience of the war from an outsider's perspective, and on Kos (2006), an invaluable resource on the trail itself. I also interviewed Nuša Kerševan (2020), a former mayor of Ljubljana, who had a major role during the time of the creation of the trail, Božo Repe (2020), a Slovenian historian of the Second World War in Slovenia, and Blaž Vurnik (2020), a chief curator for contemporary history at the City Museum of Ljubljana. The number of interviews for the research was limited because of the logistical difficulties and travel limitations during the time of the global pandemic, as I was then situated in Denmark.

Walking as a form of ethnographic method[1] also played a significant role in my research and helped me construct a broader picture of heritage on the trail, especially since walking or otherwise moving through the landscape allows for a detailed understanding of spaces (Wylie, 2002). I walked the trail several times before, alone and with company, engaging with its materiality through movement. Not being able to participate in the yearly commemorative event for the purpose of this research, I asked a group of volunteers to walk the trail instead, to answer a questionnaire and to send me photographic images of what they perceived as heritage on the trail.

Furthermore, a major body of literature in my research was connected to the role and theory of memory in heritage, where I can especially emphasize Nora's (1989) concept of *lieux de memoire* or places of memory, the works of Winter (1995, 2006), Harrison (2013), and Lowenthal (1998, 2015), as well as Connerton's (1989, 2008) integral work on remembering and forgetting in societies. MacDonald's (2012) piece on presencing Europe's past also helped me understand the trail as a reconstruction of the past as heritage in the present.

In order to fully grasp the topic in question, important sources were connected to the impact of conflict on cultural heritage (Sørensen, Viejo-Rose, 2015), commemoration of war in the contemporary setting (Sumartojo, 2016), and the use of memory in commemorative places (Drozdzewski et al., 2016a). Furthermore, Abousnnouga and Machin's (2013) work helped me understand how monuments communicate ideas, values, and identities they represent, while the volume by Carter et al. (2020) offered good insight into the articulation and change of heritage narratives in public spaces. An indispensable resource on the role and impact of revolutionary monuments in socialist Yugoslavia was also the publication on revolutionary memorials, edited by Horvatinčić and Žerovc (2023).

Finally, selected literature also helped me explore the relationship between landscapes and memory (De Nardi, Drozdzewski, 2019), the relationship between tangible and intangible manifestations of heritage and commemorative atmospheres (Sumartojo, 2016), and narratives of understanding heritage within the context of sustainability (Baker, 2006); all of which were important topics while addressing my research subject from a critical and reflective perspective. It is also important to note that my case study focuses on the management of a heritage landscape with a high emphasis on sustainability.

[1] In the social sciences and humanities, walking is not a new phenomenon and has been revisited in the context of the mobility turn, non-representational theories, and anthropology and sociology of the body and the senses (see Pink, 2007; Edensor, 2010; Ingold, 2011; Shepherd et al. 2018; Rogelja Caf, Ledinek Lozej, 2023).

Occupation and the barbed wire fence

Before starting the journey on the trail, we have to briefly touch upon its origin. Clues to the fact that the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship is first and foremost a monument to the Slovenian experience of the Second World War can already be found in the trail's title, in the words 'remembrance' and 'comradeship'. The word comradeship, for example, embodies the ideals of the organised antifascist resistance of the Slovenian Partisans (Sln. Osvobodilna Fronta, OF) against the occupiers in the Second World War in Slovenia.[2] Remembrance, on the other hand, signifies the way in which the post-war socialist Slovenian society intended to preserve these values for the present and future generations.

Resistance, spearheaded by the Communist Party of Slovenia, Christian Socialists, and the members of the gymnastic association Sokol was formed on 27 April 1941 after Slovenia, then a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was occupied and trisected between Germany, Hungary, and Italy in April 1941, with all three occupiers looking to erase any sign of Slovenian culture, nationhood and belonging in these annexed territories.

Ljubljana became the seat of the Italian occupation authorities, but it was also the centre of the Slovenian resistance movement. In order to sever the communication links between the leadership of the resistance in Ljubljana and combat units in

Figure 1. Pillbox on the trail. Photo: Darko Gregorač, 2020.

[2] What was special about the OF was that it relied especially on the young and particularly women, who were attracted by the message of female emancipation – which was fulfilled after the war (Kranjc, 2015: 72).

the countryside, the Italian occupiers decided to completely encircle the city with a ring of barbed wire fence, fortified pillboxes and barricades (Repe, 2020) and closed the ring on 23 February 1942.[3] This and other repressive measures in the city, including imprisonment, deportations, and execution of hostages, did not manage to break the resistance and the spirit of the subjugated populace.

In the end, the encirclement lasted for 1,170 days until 9 May 1945, when the detachments of the Yugoslav Army, together with Slovenian Partisan forces, finally entered and liberated the city. The fence as a physical object was subsequently cleared immediately after the war,[4] but its existence left a large physical and psychological scar on the city and its inhabitants, which became the foundation for the later commemoration of these events.

Memory and heritage

At this point, the trail can be connected to the wider field of literature on the role and impact of memory, which is one of its integral components as an object of heritage. Memory is a powerful force encountered via experiences, emotions, places, and things. It provides us with identity narratives and positions us as individuals, communities, and nations (Drozdzewski et al., 2016b: 447–448). It can be used in political, social, and cultural contexts and for various reasons; such as to remember, to forget, to control, and to keep. Because memory "highlights ancestral traits and values that are in accord with our own" (Lowenthal, 1998: 139), it has the ability to connect the past with the present. Furthermore, for Harrison (2013: 167–168), the presence of memory is one of the crucial concerns in Western societies and one of the key cultural and political phenomena of the late 20th century modernity.

Nora (1989: 18–19) also introduces the term *lieux de memoire*, or places of memory, that are simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, at once immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. These places are not everyday environments of memory, or *milieux de memoire*, but have material, symbolic, and functional value, and are created through a play of memory and history. As *lieux de memoire*, sites associated with key historical events, such as is the case with the trail, become heritage constructions of the past in the present day (Reeves, 2018: 67).

Recollection is integral in the process of heritage formation, as it recovers consciousness of former events and confirms that we actually have a past that is vital to

[3] Ljubljana was the only current capital in occupied Europe to be completely enclosed within a barbed wire fence.

[4] It was cleared by the detachments of the newly established Yugoslav National Army, while farmers cleared their fields of mines with specially modified ploughs (Repe, 2020).

Figure 2. Image from the trail. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

our being, which in turn hypnotises the present, making the circle complete (Lowenthal, 2015: 303–308). Our interpretations of the past can legitimise a present social order (Connerton, 1989: 1–4). In the example of the trail, the idea for the specific type of remembrance through active commemoration was born from the experience of the war, as a form of a reminder of what had happened and should not be repeated. As such, the trail has the power to connect the people of the present to familial histories and the history of the nation.

According to Ricouer (cited in Drozdzewski et al., 2016b: 453), the reproduction of memory is especially challenged at the intersection of private and collective memories of events, where private or autobiographical memory reflects the more privatized sense of the past and tends to fade with time. Assmann (1995: 127) notices that everyday memory of traumatic events persists for only three to four generations, which is about seventy-five to a hundred years. Collective memory, on the other hand, is a socially constructed notion that has the potential to forge identities and construct the past from the position of the present. For such engagement with the past, MacDonald (2012: 233) introduces the term of past presencing, which is concerned with "the ways in which people variously draw on, negotiate, reconstruct, and perform the past in their ongoing lives". In the case of the trail, private memories have successfully entered the public arena through an organized act of remembrance (i.e. yearly commemoration) and were given support by the political authorities of the time as a visible cultural monument, and a part of the officially recognised heritage of the city.

Shaping the trail as a memorial

Furthermore, the process of creating and designating the trail as a memorial[5] reflected wider narratives of rebuilding and developing a better, in the Slovenian case socialist society after the war. In that spirit, more than seven hundred self-governing organisations and communities signed the Contract of the Building and Maintenance of the Trail in 1977,[6] while 150,000 Ljubljana residents, 60,000 youth volunteers from Slovenia and the whole of Yugoslavia, as well as Yugoslav National Army detachments in Ljubljana participated in the construction of the trail with manual labour and voluntary contributions since 1974 (Kos, 2006: 36). Activities connected to the creation of the trail counted on the support of the local community, and relied on collective effort and cooperation, in a sense reflecting the ideals and *modus operandi* of the Slovenian Partisans, as well as the political climate in Yugoslavia at the time when the country adapted the self-management model to all public and social activities after the constitutional changes of 1974 (Kolešnik, 2023: 84).[7]

On the 40th anniversary of the liberation in May 1985, the ring was completed and the trail was officially designated as a "cultural memorial to the National Liberation Struggle (NOB), a memorial to the construction of a socialist society, and a memorial of curated nature" (MK SZDL, 1985: 2). The trail was officially protected as a memorial of common significance with a decree in 1988. At this point in time, at the onset of the end of the socialist regimes in Europe, remembering the NOB was still a prevalent narrative in the Slovenian society, however, a shift was happening. On the one hand this was a time when interest for the trail was renewed, because the people who had experienced the war were getting older and were starting to collect their memories with a wish to preserve them for the future as a part of the common experience of

[5] I refer to the term 'memorial' when addressing and discussing the trail as an object dedicated to commemoration, while 'monument' is used when focusing on its physical functions and aspects (Shanahan, Shanahan, 2017: 112).

[6] Chronologically, the timeline of the trail is as follows:
1957 – first commemorative march takes place along the trail;
1959 – first memorial pillars are erected along the original trajectory of the barbed wire fence;
1973 – first tree is planted;
1974 – first volunteers start work on sections of the trail;
1977 – Contract of the Building and Maintenance of the Trail, serving as a basis for the construction of the whole trail, is signed;
1985 – ring is completed and the trail is designated as a cultural memorial to the National Liberation Struggle (NOB), a memorial to the construction of a socialist society, and a memorial of curated nature;
1988 – the trail is protected as a memorial of common significance;
1992 – the Green Ring Association is founded;
2016 – the commemorative march is listed under the Registry of Intangible Heritage of Slovenia.

[7] Primarily connected to the economic sphere and the sphere of material production, socialist self-management was a system in socialist Yugoslavia where the workers participated in the decision-making processes within their factories and other public organisations. The system was distinct from other Soviet-style socialist systems and was designed by a Yugoslav statesman of Slovenian origin, Edvard Kardelj.

Figure 3. Trail marker. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

the nation.[8] On the other hand, the trail's designation as a memorial connected to antifascist resistance also led to its difficult period after the regime change in Slovenia in the early 1990s, when the new city authorities attacked the symbolism and message of the trail and wanted to completely erase it from the memory as a part of the "tainted" socialist past. Such changes are usually consciously selected by a certain group of people that want to contribute to the transformation of collective memory and remembrance and find it advantageous to call for the punishment of the political and coercive authorities of the fallen regimes (Hoelscher, 2011: 289).

In the early 1990s, the new city authorities stopped the funding for the maintenance of the trail and even cut down the ceremonial wooden masts, leaving them to rot along the trail (Kerševan, 2020). Since 1991, some other Partisan monuments in Slovenia, and even more so in other parts of Yugoslavia, have been completely neglected, while the ideas of the antifascist fight, such as equality and comradeship, were also put aside in the prevalent political discourses in the region.

These attacks on the symbols and the trail itself led to the formation of the volunteer-based Green Ring Association, whose founding members were connected to the resistance movement and to the creation of the trail. Such groups that actively engage in remembrance as "memory activists" (Winter, 2006: 136–140), are not connected by kinship but by experience. The association nowadays has fewer members than at

[8] In the 1990s the same people started to donate their personal memorial belongings to history museums (Vurnik, 2020).

its peak, but still cooperates well with the municipality and maintains the trail, repairs monuments damaged by vandalism, and plants trees along the route of the trail.

Trail as a war memorial

With the trail, the city has received a memorial landscape constituting of a ritualized reminder of a notable traumatic event, as well as of the general suffering and sacrifice related to it. The meaning of memorialisation on the trail is not the glorification of individual heroes or actions, but centres on the collective experience. Besides that, the trail was also created with the prospect of post-war reconciliation in mind, so it also bears a message of peace. The relevance of its remembrance value is perpetually confirmed by an annual ceremony, which contributes to collective memory by promoting a shared experience of the values and emotions encountered during the war (Osborne, 2018: 214–218).

War memorials in general proclaim an array of commemorative messages about war, including the fact that people die in wars. These memorials have been integral to the histories of European architecture and public sculpture, and have since carried powerful aesthetical and political messages. They are also physical manifestations of collective representations, aspirations and destinies, and carry a different, more personal meaning for the generation that passed through the trauma of the war (Winter, 1995: 79). According to Rowlands (2001: 144), war memorials should allow for the resolution of suffering within the community and validate personal sacrifices that should not be forgotten. They should also "show an acceptance that violence took place in a context where it is claimed that something was gained instead, and thus transform a sense of collective loss into an object of devotion and passion". Lastly, they should "ensure that the dead are deified as part of that devotional logic and have become embodied in the idea of the collective which needs to recognize the debt and willingness to reciprocate" (ibid.).

The most characteristic aspects of many monuments, especially to the First World War, is often the tomb of the unknown soldier, which aimed to pay respect, in a physical and individualized form, to the enormous numbers of fallen soldiers whose bodies were left unrecognizable or that had disappeared without a trace. The tomb of the unknown soldier symbolized all the war casualties of a given nation and expressed recognition of their valorous deeds, while also enabling survivors to mourn individual anonymous soldiers in a physical location (Jezernik, Fikfak, 2018: 15). The closest manifestation of memory that the trail has to this notion is the Monument to the Executed Hostages in a part of the trail close to the main Ljubljana cemetery, the Žale.

War memorials are also a way in which discourse about war is disseminated to the public, as they embody certain sets of values and ideals that societies want to preserve

Figure 4. Hostage. Photo: Darko Gregorač, 2020.

for the future (Abousnnouga, Machin, 2013: 1–3). For Barthes, three major carriers of connotations are architectural styles, material objects, and poses; while Panofsky mentions familiarity, iconography, and linking of objects with specific themes and symbolic values. Social relations in monuments are best communicated through elevation, angle of interaction, size, gaze of the statues, and the impression of distance or proximity, while the choice of materials, shape and surface also plays a role (ibid.: 35–51). The trail itself was designed as a monument that is easily accessible and relies on the interaction with the public. It is a solid object, yet still organic and welcoming, which is enhanced by the choice of a macadam-paved walking surface.

Trail as a chain of memorials

Here we shall move to materiality on the trail, which is especially important with heritage sites such as the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship, as it generally affects people's direct encounter with a place, and provides means for the recollection of memory. Monuments and memorials, especially those that are large, concrete, and strategically placed, are constructed and located with the intention of communicating specific representations of the past and binding them to the material form of the present, by which they become places of politics and contestation (De Nardi, Drozdzewski, 2019: 433–434).

Construction of memorials is a well-established cultural practice where memorials can function as memory markers of deeds, have specific political and ideological messages,

Figure 5. Octagonal memorial pillar. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

and mark celebration or mourning (Sørensen et al., 2019: 1–6). It is important to note that the design for the trail was first made by local students of architecture, and later followed by a national competition for the completion of the trail. This was common for Yugoslav monuments, which were mostly all created by Yugoslav sculptors, architects and designers, many of whom have experienced the war themselves and were also active participants of the National Liberation Movement.

The monuments thus made were positioned on a thin line between art and propaganda, between negotiated past and utopian future. The Yugoslav state had a monopoly over monument production, which was so prominent that almost three monuments, memorials or sculptures per day were erected for the first sixteen years after the Second World War (Baillie, 2019: 183–189). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Partisan veterans' associations reports revealed that there was virtually no place in the country without at least one commemorative plaque in honour of somebody from the war (Karge, 2023: 94). The war experience of the Partisan movement also influenced the shape of the monuments, as especially those that were centrally initiated as "important historical sites along the route of the Supreme Staff and the Central Committee during the war" (Karge, 2023: 103–104), became monumental sculptures. The trail, on the other hand, is still an impressive reminder of the city's past, but its strength does not lie in dominant presence but in persistence, embodied in a way that marks the city without giving off an impression of an overt monument.

Although the trail does not have a central piece or cenotaph, it nevertheless boasts some highly recognizable physical elements. The most iconic are the octagonal memorial pillars,

designed by the architect Vlasto Kopač. The first of these pillars were erected in 1959, and there are currently 102 of them distributed rather evenly along the trail at the approximate sites of the former pillboxes. They all have a distinctive feature in common, which is an engraved symbol of the barbed wire fence and the years 1942–1945, that clearly connect them to the memory of the Second World War. However, looking closely, one can see two other details that enhance their value as heritage and preserve them as monuments, not only to the events of the Second World War but also to the era in which they were built in.

The first is that they are all made of concrete and not of a more precious material, such as the "cold, heavy, and smooth marble" (Abousnnouga, Machin, 2013: 133) often used as a building material for monuments. This was probably a conscious material choice, as it embodies the ideas of progress, industrialisation and modernisation in the post-war years, all of which were important narratives of the socialist society in Slovenia and Yugoslavia at the time. The second, and probably an even more telling detail, is that each one is inscribed with the name of a different working collective or company that sponsored its placement. With this, the pillars offer unique insight into a part of Slovenian history under socialism, as many of these state-owned companies and collectives were once the pride of the developing socialist industry in the country, and almost none made it through the transition in the early 1990s – an experience not unknown to many former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The indication of their existence on the pillars is now often the only physical reminder that they ever existed in the nation's history.

Besides those, there are many other, sometimes hidden remnants of the war along the trail, such as remnants of pillboxes, some of which have been renovated, newly erected ceremonial masts, and the five-pointed stars in the letter o of *pot* (Eng. trail) in the official trail and blaze markers.

Trail as a green ring

Visual memorial elements constitute an important part of the trail as a memorial landscape and possess a clear emotional component in the commemoration of war and resistance, however, the trail was designed as more than just that and was incorporated in the city's urbanist plans, having been built by section since the mid-seventies until it was finally completed as a "green ring" in 1985.[9] In the elaborate for the competition of the trail's final design, the trail itself was presented as a framework to "conduct unique city values through the use of architecture as a cultural signifier of society in space"

[9] The choice of the colour green clearly indicates the ambitions to create the backbone for the new development of green, garden, and recreational areas in the city (MK SZDL, 1984: 1).

Figure 6. Trail in the city. Photo: Jernej Gregorač, 2024.

(Odbor za Izgradnjo PST, 1984: 1). Because the route of the trail corresponds to the natural radial and concentric expansion of the city, they suggested it would be the generator of its future shape and development. It would also become a point where the urban meets the rural, and at the same time "a borderline and the city's integral seam". The outcome of this competition was successful, especially in regards to the creation of natural elements along the trail in the urban areas and their preservation in the natural environment (ibid.: 2–4). It is important to note that the goal here was not to preserve nature as it once was, but to purposefully curate it in a way that conveys a message that the horrors of the barbed wire were replaced with a greener, brighter future.

The trail traverses all the major neighbourhoods of the city, and its circular shape enables it to connect the residential and industrial districts to meadows, forest and agricultural surfaces, emphasising the richness of built and natural environments of the city. As such, the true value of the trail lies in the form of a prospective memory, an unfolding and ongoing relationship between the past, the present, and the future (Harvey, Wilkinson, 2019: 179).

During the building of the trail, a strong emphasis was especially on the preservation of the natural environment – curating and maintaining the trail in a way that enables the safekeeping of the newly established natural environment. This was also indicated in the Ljubljana City Council's strategic spatial plan in 2010, which emphasizes the trail in the city's "upgrade of existing urban areas, supplementing of existing infrastructure,

and encouragement of sustainable use of space and maintenance of green surfaces" (MOL, 2010: 11382). The trail now contains the longest tree avenues in the city, with more than seven thousand trees planted alongside it. The Green Ring Association manages the planting of trees in collaboration with a professional dendrologist, who carefully selects the types of trees and takes care that they are planted with enough space between them so that they can fully develop. Some trees are planted by prominent individuals, ambassadors and heads of states, and are set in a special area called the Friendship Park (Sln. Park Prijateljstva), however, anyone can plant a tree for a donation. The focus of the creation and management of the trail has since its very beginning been an eco-centric one, as it focused on the community level, on maintenance of the local and communal wellbeing, and on harmonious use of resources (Baker, 2006: 28), which indicates a strong emphasis on sustainability as part of managing the trail as heritage.

The trail is also a good example of how heritage can be used as a tool for involving and empowering communities and recognising social value (Clark, 2008: 82–92). Cultural heritage often relies on active local communities, both amateurs such as the Green Ring Association on the example of the trail, and professionals working with authorities on a daily basis in the conservation, maintenance, and interpretation of historic structures and cultural landscapes (Barthel-Bouchier, 2013: 190).

Community involvement and participation are essential for the promotion of sustainable development, as they foster democratic engagement, ecological practices, and the advocating of certain values. However, this can also bring along specific setbacks, such as who decides who gets to set the agenda, or the promotion of narrow interests (Baker, 2006: 41–45). The Ljubljana city authorities were fortunately open for suggestions from groups engaged in preserving the memory of the war. This shows that although certain state-sponsored narratives were integral for the build-up of official ideology, some socialist regimes were open for the motions from below, and were also willing to listen to and include the participants in all stages of the process, from planning to construction.

Besides community engagement, successfully managing cultural heritage on an example such as the trail also includes respect of the natural environment, conservation of the material forms, safeguarding of the intangible heritage, and the promotion of creative practices that make places meaningful to local communities over time. Such acknowledgement of interactions between culture and nature, people and the environment, and between tangible and intangible manifestations of heritage is in general relevant in the development of the concept of cultural landscapes for the World Heritage listing (Vahtikari, 2017: 47). It is also important not to neglect inclusivity in the face of pressures from economic development that has accompanied rapid urbanisation (Hosagrahar, 2018: 69–71).

Figure 7. Planting of a new tree. Photo: Jernej Gregorač, 2024.

Movement as engagement with the trail

Movement is still the most common way to experience the trail, and it is precisely movement that is celebrated on the trail as a triumph over the limitations of the barbed wire fence during the occupation. In order to break with the trauma of these events that took place in the city during the Second World War, the creators wished to promote the trail as an open and accessible space, and conceptualized it in such a way.

Practical experience embodied through walking is also indistinguishable from the cultural and symbolical meanings behind it (Wylie, 2002: 443), while the affect achieved through walking denotes the shifting moods, colour or intensity of places and situations. Walking through a memorial landscape in particular also has connotations to religious practices and dimensions, especially through the element of searching for something intangible. While secular walking is imagined as playful and efficient, pilgrimages often try to make the journey harder, demanding suffering and even sacrifice (Solnit, 2002: 45–58). Such movement has a profound symbolic value, as the intangible notion of memory materializes itself through this practice (ibid.: 72–76).

The manifestation of remembrance on the trail today is an organized commemorative march, colloquially known as the March Along the Barbed Wire Fence (Sln. Pohod – Pot ob Žici), that symbolically connects the past with the present and takes

place every Saturday closest to the 9th of May to celebrate the liberation of the city in 1945.[10] Yearly commemorations, such as this one, often "draw together national identity, collective and individual memory, grief and mourning, regular ritual, and material, aesthetic representations of war and death" (Sumartojo, 2016: 541). Collective portrayals of memory often seek to collectivise individual memories into an imagined community of the nation to the extent that the portrayal of the national pasts in monuments and memorials has become synonymous with the symbolic transmission of national identity. In this regard, commemorations have become mnemonic techniques for localising collective memory and making the national narrative visible in the public space (Drozdzewski, 2016a: 19–20).

The march is today promoted as a commemorative, recreational, and sporting event and has been listed under the Registry of Intangible Heritage of Slovenia in 2016 as "a march along the route of a historical monument that connects the city's experience of the Second World War to modern challenges, such as healthy lifestyle and recreation. This well-visited annual event helps maintain the memory and form the identity of the city" (MK RS, 2016: 3). The annual march also "encourages the people to an active and healthy way of life, socializing on the trail, and care for the environment in which they live in" (MK RS, 2016: 1).

The central commemoration has evolved during the years and was in the beginning shaped by the ideals, narratives and realities of the Yugoslav socialism. At its outset the march was a true test of comradeship and endurance. The participants in the first march in 1957, an event sponsored by the Second World War Veterans' Association, had to carry twelve kilograms of equipment per person, including a Mauser rifle, and were grouped in teams. In 1958 the participants also had to shoot at a target, while, like in a biathlon, points were deducted for each missed shot.

In this aspect, the event has changed over the years but is still divided into the actual march that is open to everyone and to an accompanying run, which has a more competitive and athletic note.[11] By this, it is both a commemorative as well as a sporting event, with more than 30,000 people participating annually. It takes place over three days, as kindergarteners open it on a first Thursday in May, schoolchildren march on a Friday, while the central march and run take place on a Saturday. Each participant receives a commemorative pin, while those who manage to walk the full circle receive a commemorative medal.[12]

Even outside of the official ceremony, movement is the best indicator on how the trail is not relying solely on the memorial component and has adapted to contemporary times. It is considered a popular destination for runners and hikers, a recreational space,

[10] This date is nowadays also celebrated as Europe Day.

[11] To reflect the cooperative spirit of the Slovenian Partisans, the participants run in groups of three and the results count when the final member of the group crosses the finish line.

[12] I currently have six, being no stranger to the trail personally.

Figure 8. Commemorative medal. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

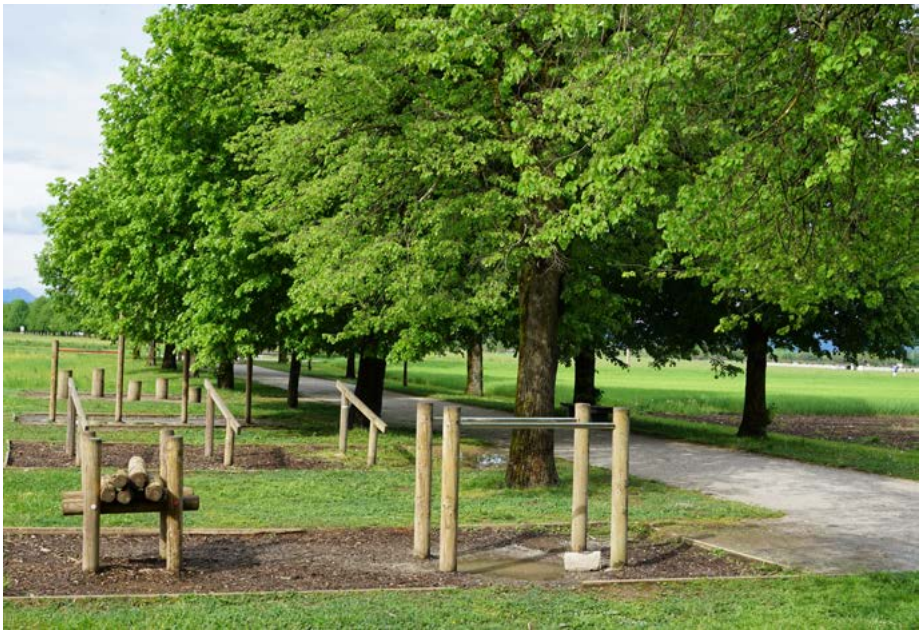

Figure 9. Exercise area on the trail. Photo: Jure Burnik, 2020.

and a transit route for cyclists. In practical terms this means that it encompasses carefully placed exercise spots, picnic tables, benches and water fountains, while it is also accompanied by bicycle lanes alongside it. It is a democratic space in the sense that it allows everybody to choose their own tempo and level of engagement with heritage.

During the research, I wanted to see how local people perceive the trail and what it means to them. The results were interesting in a sense that the older participants seemed to have a stronger emotional connection to the heritage experience of the trail outside exclusively officially recognised heritage narratives of the trail. For them, the connection was also manifested through stronger feelings of nostalgia and the impact of personal or familial memories of the Second World War, and generally through broader knowledge on the topic. On the other hand, the younger participants emphasized the recreational and socialising aspects of the trail, but some of them also expressed the wish that there would be more informational content on the history of the space. All of the participants agreed that the trail is an important part of the heritage of the city, and especially during the recent global pandemic was a space associated with the freedom of movement. With this in mind, we can see that even though the commemoration is integral to the official narrative of the trail, its real power lies in the incorporation of movement as a part of the city's history, fabric, and the living environment.

Conclusion

Through the elements of memory, materiality, and movement on the Trail of Remembrance and Comradeship in Ljubljana we can explore how a place of heritage and memory can be created, and how it can be maintained in a contemporary setting and in a way that reflects the generational, political, and environmental changes. It is not solely an officially recognised monument in the city, but is at the same time the city's largest heritage surface, its connective vein and a "green ring". Not used exclusively for the commemorative purpose listed under the Registry of Intangible Heritage of Slovenia, it is yet a silent and unobtrusive, though persistent reminder of the past, a multi-layered heritage phenomenon.

The trail has its origins in the preservation of the memory and the experience of the Second World War in Ljubljana, but has later been adapted to new challenges within the city and the society. The way in which the trail was designed by the people who experienced the war and were connected to the resistance movement shows that the intention here was not only to glorify and memorise a tragic event of the past, but to channel this traumatic experience and actively defy it. The symbol of the barbed wire fence, this general element of limitation of movement, has been transformed into a place that perpetually celebrates and promotes movement and symbolically breaks the constraints of the barbed wire fence.

Furthermore, the trail is also a monument of the socialist past in Slovenia, to the way how historical narratives were manifested in that period, what this society valued back then, and how it took on the task of presenting it as heritage. In that sense, it embodies a powerful memory that is used as a literal journey into a specific cultural history of a place (MacDonald, 2012: 245). I have also not encountered such a level of engagement with the natural environment, albeit curated, in any other war memorial site during my research, which is a good indicator that the trail as a heritage site has been well devised in this regard. The construction and management of the trail can be considered an example of good practice of how the authorities can cooperate with associations from the community and rely on cooperative actions and volunteer work. Of course, some doubts might be connected to the intentions and ideological narrative behind the construction of such monuments during the socialist period in Yugoslavia, but we also have to bear in mind that the official documents connected to its creation clearly state that the trail is also a monument of "curated nature" (MK SZDL, 1985: 2), and that the expansion of potential of memory to forge identities in this manner has its roots in the rise of the nineteenth century nationalism (Sutcliffe et al., 2018: 8).

Finally, because of its multiple tangible and intangible heritage layers, the trail is a good example of heritage as a process, a meaning, and a relationship. It also presents us with possibilities of how heritage spaces can become generators of added contents in the changing city environments. It is a space of the people and for the people to celebrate the city's past, as well as a place for newer generations to create their own memories, engage with the history of the city through everyday activities outside of the "official" commemorative occasions, and to effectively march on the memory of the city.

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Hoja s spomini: dediščina na Poti spominov in tovarištva v Ljubljani

V članku avtor z izhodišča dediščinskih študij predstavi spominsko pot, Pot spominov in tovarištva (PST), v Ljubljani. V spomin na to, da je bila Ljubljana v drugi svetovni vojni obdana z bodečo žico, je pot spomenik, ki popolnoma obkroža mesto. Je del tako snovne kot nesnovne dediščine mesta, saj po njej poteka pohod v spomin na vojne dogodke, danes pa je zaradi urejenosti postala tudi del mesta, ki ga prebivalci dnevno uporabljajo tudi v namene, ki niso neposredno povezani z ohranjanjem tega spomina.

Izhodišča raziskave so spomin, materialnost in gibanje, povezani z dediščino, ki jo pot predstavlja za mesto, in vprašanja, kako so se v času socializma v Sloveniji ustvarjale dediščinske površine v prostoru in spominskem tkivu lokalnih skupnosti ter kako se z dodajanjem novih vsebin takšni prostori lahko ohranijo tudi, ko zbledijo osebni spomini na dogodke, ki jih spomeniki zaznamujejo.

Podlaga za raziskavo je bila literatura o spominu in dediščini, vojnih spomenikih, nesnovnih komemoracijah spominskih dogodkov v javnem prostoru ter o neposrednem izkustvu dediščine oz. gibanju po njej. Po zasnovi je pot spomenik, ki povezuje snovno z nesnovno dediščino, zato omogoča raziskave obeh področij.

Po kratkem zgodovinskem orisu druge svetovne vojne v Ljubljani, avtor najprej postavi pot kot spomenik v širši kontekst teorij o vlogi spomina v dediščini. V nadaljevanju sledi predstavitev procesa dediščinjenja poti, ki je v grobem potekalo od leta 1957, ko je bil na poti izveden prvi dogodek v spomin na čas, ko je mesto bilo obdano z bodečo žico, do leta 2016, ko je bil pohod ob žici vpisan v slovenski register nesnovne kulturne dediščine. Pomembna prelomnica pri tem je tudi leto 1985, ko je pot kot sklenjena celota popolnoma obkrožila Ljubljano ter postala priznana kot spomenik.

Naslednji poglavji se dotikata materialnosti poti oz. poti kot fizičnega spomenika, ki je celota več spomenikov – spomenik na vojno, spomenik družbi in spomenik socialistični Sloveniji v socialistični Jugoslaviji. Pri tem se avtor opre predvsem na literaturo o vojnih spomenikih, s posebnim poudarkom na jugoslovanskih, med katere se uvršča tudi ljubljanska pot.

Pot pa je več kot zgolj fizični spomenik. Že ob nastajanju je bila zarisana v urbanistične načrte mesta. Zaradi dreves, ki so jih od 70. let prejšnjega stoletja načrtno sadili ob njej, se je uveljavila tudi kot »zeleni obroč«, ki prebivalcem nudi dostopno zeleno površino in predvsem na posebej pogozdovanih delih tudi neposredni stik z naravo. Kot taka je tudi zgled ustvarjanja trajnostno usmerjene kulturne dediščine.

V zadnjem poglavju avtor analizira pot kot del dediščine mesta še z vidika elementa gibanja in je pozoren predvsem na vsakoletni majski pohod, ki praznuje osvoboditev mesta v maju 1945. Pohod je dobro obiskan dogodek, pri katerem se prepletata ohranjanje spomina in rekreativni značaj. Avtor poudari pomen gibanja pri zaznavanju in vrednotenju dediščine. S tem se sklene krog analize z elementi spomina, materialnosti in gibanja ter poudari spoznanje, da dediščina lahko preseže svoje snovne razsežnosti, ko se z njo ustvarja odnos skupnosti do preteklosti.

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Forgotten, Renamed, Reclaimed: Bulgaria's Ottoman Heritage beyond the Authorised Dissonance

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The study explores the presence of the Ottoman heritage in Bulgaria. Despite its exclusion from the national heritage canon, different communities engage with and valorise it. Using a scalar approach, we examine how heritage operates at various levels, revealing the dynamic interplay of dominant and vernacular discourses. Drawing on anthropological fieldwork, the paper highlights the mosaic of memories, narratives, and practices that reclaim Ottoman heritage today.

▪ **Keywords**: Ottoman heritage, dissonance, heritage scales, Bulgaria, Balkans

V raziskavi je obravnavana navzočnost osmanske dediščine v Bolgariji. Čeprav jo avtorizirani dediščinski diskurz izključuje iz nacionalnega kanona, se različne skupnosti aktivno ukvarjajo z njo in jo na novo vrednotijo. Z uporabo skalarnega pristopa avtorja preučujeta, kako dediščina deluje na različnih ravneh, in razkrivata vzajemno dinamično delovanje dominantnih in vernakularnih diskurzov. V članku je na podlagi antropološkega terenskega dela poudarjen mozaik spominov, pripovedi in praks, ki danes obnavljajo osmansko dediščino.

▪ **Ključne besede**: osmanska dediščina, disonantnost, večstopenjskost dediščine, Bolgarija, Balkan

Introduction: The Ottoman heritage beyond the authorised heritage discourse?

The exclusion of the Ottoman past from the heritage layers valorised in Southeastern Europe is a well-documented phenomenon (e.g. Todorova, 1995; Hajdarpašić, 2008; Ginio, Kaser, 2013; Lory, 2015; Kolovos, Poulos, 2021). It can be argued that the authorised heritage discourses (AHD) (Smith, 2006) of the predominantly Christian post-Ottoman Balkan nations ascribe a specific "authorised dissonance" to Ottoman heritage, thereby relegating it to a position of marginality. The Ottoman rule is predominantly viewed through the framework of what Kiel (1985: 33–35) terms "catastrophe theory", portraying it as an era of profound destruction and lacking cultural significance. This framework invariably defines the Ottoman legacy as "undesired" (Kiel, 2005) or "rejected" (Aretov, 2008), and therefore makes it "contested" (Smith, 2006: 35–42) and "dissonant" (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996). It also marks the radical transformation from imperial rule to independent nation-states

with concerted efforts to erase Ottoman traces, a phenomenon frequently referred to as de-Ottomanisation (Vucinich, 1963: 114; Hartmuth, 2006; Lory, 2015). The consequences of the latter are multifaceted, impacting both material and intangible remnants of the Ottoman past. Many such remnants have faced neglect, abandonment, destruction, or transformation. The demographic changes that accompanied the decline of the Ottoman Empire further complicate this situation. The expulsion of Muslim and Turkish populations from the former Ottoman provinces in Europe raises questions about the disintegration of heritage communities. In this context, Ottoman heritage can be seen as a "heritage left without heirs", as Kolovos (2015) has suggested in the case of Crete – an observation that resonates with many parts of the region. Or, as Lewis (2010: 161) has noted about Bulgaria's material heritage, these are monuments "bereft of past, present, and future".

These observations align with our previous research, and yet this is just a partial perspective to the complex presence of the Ottoman heritage in the post-Ottoman Balkans, which overlooks the immanent dissonance of every heritage construct (Tunbridge, Ashworth, 1996; Smith, 2006: 80–84). Without denying the validity of the AHD that excludes this layer from the nationally-celebrated past, we argue that Ottoman heritage is actively being reclaimed today by various communities and individuals. Focusing on the case of Bulgaria, our study draws on more-than-representational theories (Waterton, 2014) to highlight the manifold memories, narratives, and practices that valorise and care for the remnants of the Ottoman Empire, transmuting them into forms of cultural heritage deeply connected to individuals, families, and communities. Thus, this paper endeavours to transcend the limitations of a one-dimensional perspective by offering an alternative approach – one that champions the diversity and agency embedded within the heritage tapestry. In juxtaposing these competing perspectives, our objective is to underscore the dynamic and multifaceted nature of heritage-making within a seemingly homogeneous heritage canon. This approach challenges both the idea of an overpowering and exhaustive AHD and the notion of a monolithic nation as an imagined community, offering a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of Ottoman heritage in Bulgaria and the broader Balkan region.

This hypothesis is based on a decade of anthropological fieldwork that has revealed such a complex picture and invited us to rethink and "downscale" our research focus. To explore the coexistence of perceptions, we employ a scalar approach. Following Harvey (2015), we acknowledge that the Ottoman heritage operates at various interrelated scales, which interact and affect each other in the context of dynamic power relations. At the national scale – which is heavily entangled with the broader European, that is often Eurocentric and Orientalist discourse – the AHD tends to present a singular narrative of contested heritage. Shifting the focus to the subnational, local, familial, and personal scales illuminates how the dominant discourse influences everyday, intimate or locally rooted perceptions of heritage. However, this also reveals how various communities

breathe life into Ottoman heritage by imbuing it with meaning, integrating it into their own cultural fabric and sense of place, and linking it to both collective and individual identities. The following sections reflect on these assumptions to unpack the content of the different scales, while acknowledging that these are not independent, but rather mutually constitutive.

By tracing these various scales, our research underscores that Ottoman heritage is not a monolithic entity, but a dynamic mosaic shaped and continuously renegotiated by myriad voices and experiences. Additionally, it delves into the politics of scale to demonstrate the existence of a "multi-scalarity of heritage discourses" (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019: 11) related to the (post-)Ottoman past. That is, to examine the relationships between the powerful discourses that contest the Ottoman heritage and make it dissonant, and the voices contesting the authorised dissonance of Ottoman heritage. As Lähdesmäki et al. (2019: 11) have argued, "in heritage discourses and practices, micro and macro scales of heritage commonly merge and affect each other". To explore this interplay and hierarchies, we focus on the vernacular practices and engagements with the Ottoman past emerging from socially and politically marginalised positions, while also paying attention to the hegemonic discourse created by the national state through its cultural and educational institutions. We draw on Robertson's (2012: 1) concept of "heritage from below" to highlight that heritage is "about people, collectivity and individuals, and about their sense of inheritance from the past".

Methodological notes

Our research commenced in 2014, focusing on the exclusion of Ottoman heritage from the Bulgarian AHD. At this stage, we analysed public debates and strong resistance – spanning political, media, and civil spheres – against legal efforts by the Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria to reclaim ownership of Ottoman mosques that had been nationalised in earlier periods. This research explored the discourses of rejection, their emotional and legal manifestations, and the counter-discourses articulated by Muslim communities (Strahilov, Karakusheva, 2015, 2018).

Since 2014, we have maintained consistent fieldwork through short-term visits to various locations in Bulgaria, alongside observations in cities in other Balkan countries such as Edirne, Istanbul, Skopje, and Athens. In 2015, our scope expanded to include grassroots practices of Ottoman heritage preservation. This downscaling shift was prompted by three independent local initiatives aimed at safeguarding Ottoman mosques in three Bulgarian towns – Razgrad, Silistra, and Gotse Delchev. We interpreted these actions as expressions of care and emotional attachment to Ottoman heritage "from below" (Strahilov, Karakusheva, 2020). In 2019, during field studies, we encountered personal recollections where crumbling mosques and (already destroyed) Ottoman

public baths in proximity intertwined. These narratives led us to broaden our research to include vernacular perspectives on Ottoman-era heritage, encompassing both religious and secular structures. We hypothesised that secular buildings, such as public baths, offer a more nuanced understanding of individual or local relationships with Ottoman heritage. Since 2021, we have been exploring this hypothesis further through a focused study on Ottoman bathhouses, examining their continuity and transformations.

This paper draws on the extensive material that has been gathered through qualitative methods. Primarily, our findings are based on the results of a multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork, including direct and participant observation in mosques, bathhouses, and specific events across multiple locations, visits to museums and heritage sites, and walks guided by local people. We engaged in semi-structured interviews and informal conversations that allowed us to hear and understand the views, memories, and attitudes of numerous people. These interactions involved individuals from diverse ethnic (Bulgarian, Turkish, Roma, Pomak) and religious (Christian, Sunni Muslim, Alevi, Jewish) backgrounds. Our interlocutors also represented a broad range of social profiles and professional roles, including residents living near Ottoman monuments, members of different Muslim communities, activists, officials of local and national authorities, representatives of the Bulgarian Grand Mufti's Office of the Muslim Denomination, visitors to and employees of bathhouses, museum experts, scholars, and tourists. The article is based on the perspectives of individuals whose voices are often silenced or omitted by the AHD. In addition to our ethnographic study, we conducted media analysis, including social media platforms like Facebook, and documentary research, including archival research.

National scale: Authorising Ottoman heritage dissonance

To unravel the various microscales at which the Ottoman heritage exists, it is essential to position them within the broader context where they emerge and interact. Extensive scholarship discusses the dominant discourse that contests the Ottoman heritage within Christian communities across the Balkans, despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the profound impact left by the Ottoman Empire on local populations and their cultures. Consequently, the modern nationalisms of newly established states have defined this legacy as problematic, leading to myriad attempts to disassociate from it with multiple outcomes in different national frameworks. In the context of post-Ottoman changes, the redrawing of state borders and the reciprocal exchange of populations, the religious (and sometimes secular) buildings of the former populations were often perceived as "the Other's heritage", leading to lasting effects on the ways they were (not) valorised and preserved (Amygdalou et al., 2022; Tarhan, 2022).

Since de-Ottomanising endeavours often coincide with the adoption of "Western" cultural models, the powerful influence of long-lasting Europeanisation for legitimising Ottoman heritage dissonance is noteworthy. The embrace of the concept of "Europe", with its Orientalist and Balkanist implications, alongside the traumatic aspirations to be part of it, significantly shapes the conceptualisation of the Ottoman heritage in post-Ottoman Balkan nations (Bryce, Čaušević, 2019). Since Islam and Islamic heritage are in general contested in and by this "Europe" (Shatanawi et al., 2021), any association with Ottoman heritage – often uncritically interpreted as related to Islam – could be seen as problematic and risks reinforcing (self-)attributed non-Europeanness of the newly established states.

Therefore, the dissociation from the Ottoman past derives from complex nation-building processes in the 19th and 20th centuries, making it the quintessential bearer of a primordial dissonance. The respective national AHD as a powerful conceptual framework not only defines the layers of heritage deemed appropriate and nationally-celebrated, neutralising their inherent dissonances, but also renders specific heritage layers dissonant (Smith, 2006: 80–84). In our case, the Bulgarian AHD frames Ottoman heritage as fundamentally dissonant. This is particularly evident in the narrative of Sofia's past, marked by multiple heritage layers since prehistory. As Peychev (2023) demonstrates, both Bulgarian archaeologists and architectural historians have consistently neglected or understated the Ottoman period of the city and contrasted it with idealised assumptions of Roman and mediaeval Bulgarian urban planning and practices, thus creating the stereotype of an "Oriental city". This interpretive framework reflects the national AHD. The latter emphasises the European character of Bulgarian culture, often dismissing any Ottoman influence as unimportant or "backward", thus epistemologically juxtaposing it with more "prestigious" Roman and Bulgarian heritages (Peychev, 2023: 50–54).

Hence, dealing with the authorised dissonance of the Ottoman heritage involves processes of erasure, purification, museumification, and reconfiguration of various elements from spheres such as language, music, architecture, everyday and ritual practices. Some of these elements – appropriated and refashioned – have been adopted as symbols of the respective national culture (Marinov, 2017; Resanovic, 2019). An important aspect of these dynamics, integrated into city planning (Yerolympos, 1993), was the physical destruction of material traces and the elimination of "shameful" Oriental silhouettes in the urban landscape. While some of the structures remained, they underwent radical symbolic transformations testifying to the changed situation and the appearance of the successor states to the Ottoman Empire as new and powerful actors.

For instance, following Sofia's designation as the capital of Bulgaria, the former *konak* (Ottoman administration building) was converted into a royal palace. At the same time, Hünkâr Hamam (Sultan's bath) in Plovdiv served as the Parliament building of

Eastern Rumelia[1] (Boykov, 2013: 71). The situation was similar in Greece where the first Parliament House utilised an Ottoman-era mosque in the town of Nafplio in the 1820s (Amygdalou, Kolovos, 2021). Yet, this "transition from religious to secular and from symbol of the *enemy* to symbol of the *nation*" (Amygdalou, Kolovos, 2021) is not entirely surprising, considering that these buildings are representative and monumental edifices that were otherwise lacking in the nascent nation-states. While some of these reuses were temporary, others persist to this day, housing institutions of national significance. For example, the Greek Ministry of Interior (Sector of Macedonia and Thrace) occupies the Ottoman-era *konak* in Thessaloniki (Yazıcı Metin, 2013); the National Archaeological Museum in Sofia is housed in a former mosque, where the frescoes have been obscured by white paint and the exhibition itself almost completely ignores the Ottoman period; the National Gallery of North Macedonia is situated within the premises of the former Daut Paşa Hamam in Skopje.

In certain instances, the reshaping of spaces and values is so profound that it leads to the complete obliteration of the past and the imposition of a new singular, emotionally charged historical narrative. Illustrative for this process is the Bulgarian town of Karlovo. Once established as a settlement by an Ottoman dignitary (Boykov, 2013: 278–316), it is seen nowadays solely as the birthplace of the greatest national hero of the anti-Ottoman struggles. The latter narrative led to the "neutralisation" of the local mosque as a museum, hindering the Muslim denomination's attempts to make it functional, despite the presence of a local Muslim community. Such symbolic transformations stem from the portrayal of the Ottoman past in Bulgaria as an era of oppression and suffering, marked by religious and civilisational opposition. Narratives of dissonance have been deeply ingrained in the collective memory through the institutions of the nation-state, fostering a sense of grievance and victimhood. Additionally, the emphasis on the idea of national "liberation" is related to the depiction of the Ottoman period as a (Turkish) "yoke", further reinforcing the negative connotations associated with Ottoman heritage.

This discourse remains powerful (Pramatarov, 2024) and is even being revived by the rising ethnonationalism. Nevertheless, different case studies contain ambivalent stances (Mattioli, 2013; Givre, Sintès, 2018; Walton, 2019) and reveal various scenarios of contrasting processes of preservation, appropriation and erasure. Furthermore, considering the *longue durée* of multiple cultural interactions among different communities, we can hypothesise that Ottoman heritage – both as material remains and still-living cultural practices – has its heirs beyond ethnoreligious boundaries.

[1] Eastern Rumelia was an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire created in 1878 that united with the Principality of Bulgaria in 1885.

The spirit of place: Memories and practices of heritagisation

Despite the various strategies of the Bulgarian state to demolish or appropriate the Ottoman-era architecture, imperial material traces remained present in urban and rural settings. Mosques, bathhouses, bridges, clock towers, administrative and residential buildings – whether used for their original functions, adapted to new purposes or abandoned – have been integrated into the post-imperial development of various settlements (e.g. Krastanova, Rautenberg, 2004). Preserved for different utilitarian or aesthetic reasons, some of them have actively participated in shaping the *genius loci*.

As tangible testimonies of not only imperial or national, but also local history, these buildings occupy an important place in public space. They are not mere remnants of the past or witnesses of political and social transitions but living entities that carry stories of coexistence, conflict, transmission, and transformation. They serve as waypoints in the daily trajectories of residents, while also playing a role in shaping social interactions. Regardless of the different attempts at geographical nationalisation and toponymic engineering, the physical space still preserves the cultural memory related to the once ruling empire. The imperial legacy persists in the names of squares (e.g. the central Cumaya square in Plovdiv named after the nearby Friday mosque), bus stops (e.g. The Mosque stop in Silistra), villages and towns named after (once or still) existing bathhouses or hot springs (e.g. Banya, Banevo, Ladzhene). Formally or informally, because of political decisions, resistant vernacular toponymy, or social practices, such names illustrate that Ottoman edifices were integrated into the social construction of place, the public image of the settlement and its inhabitants' sense of belonging.

Switching from the national to the local scale, we shift our attention away from the dominant politics that tend to disregard the Ottoman layer in the national heritage canon. Instead, we focus on those grassroots heritagisation narratives and practices that acknowledge its significance in the local history and social fabric. These are practices of care that aim not only to preserve material heritage, but also to safeguard one's own cultural identity, family and community memory. Furthermore, this care at the local scale reveals the importance of Ottoman sites in people's relationships with their places. In this regard, the impressive monumentality or the historical characteristics of the sites prove to be as valuable to our interlocutors as their social meanings. This derives from the daily interactions and living with the monuments (Fabre, 2010). From the residents' perspective, these sites are not merely tourist or historical landmarks but community places that have served a range of purposes – religious ceremonies, hygienic needs, administrative functions, or meeting points. Their social roles have both structured the space and fostered community cohesion over time. Accordingly, vernacular collective memory often recalls myriad stories centred on Ottoman-era buildings, highlighting their role as places of cohabitation where architectural and social values intersect.

Some narratives even reconstruct now-demolished Ottoman structures, repositioning them in evolving cityscapes, thus creating communal or personal mental maps of heritage.

The village of Banya, Southwestern Bulgaria, offers a compelling example through which the Ottoman heritage can be understood from such a perspective. Its very name, Banya (meaning 'bath'), reflects the fundamental connection with hot waters, communal bathhouses and bathing traditions dating back to the Ottoman era, which has shaped the village's identity, history, and development. Two small thermal baths from the Ottoman period remain as tangible symbols of this heritage, now functioning as tourist sites. For much of their existence, they were the only public buildings in the village and focal points of community life among Christians and Muslims. After Banya's incorporation from the Ottoman into the Bulgarian state in 1912, the baths became municipal properties. Despite this political recontextualisation, their importance endured. The local authorities recognised the baths as valuable economic and social assets, undertaking continuous efforts to preserve and enhance them. This included "beautifying" the area with parks and integrating the baths into the village's evolving territorial planning. The local resistance to state attempts at nationalisation during the 1920s further highlights the community's strong identification with the baths, which continued to be seen as the heart of Banya's economy and legacy.

The baths served as public facilities until a new, larger bathhouse was constructed in the 1950s. The latter represented a continuation of the local bathing traditions, integrating them into modern notions of hygiene. When the new bath became operational, it retained key architectural elements of the Ottoman bathing tradition, such as the combination of hot pools and *kurni* (fountains for bathing). This ensured a transition between the old and the new, allowing the transmission of bathing practices and rituals that remain alive even today. Meanwhile, the old baths continued to function for a few more decades and were later recognised as historical monuments, though they were left abandoned until restoration in 2013. In recent years, the area in front of one of them was repurposed as a stage for a folk festival, embedding the site within the village's cultural life.

Historically, public baths (*kaplıca* or *hamam*) were an integral part of the Ottoman Empire's communal infrastructure serving essential hygienic, religious, health, and social purposes (Macaraig, 2019). The adaptation of the "old" Ottoman bath models and bathing traditions into "new" and "modern" hygienic practices and facilities occurred in parallel with the processes of demarcation of their Ottoman descent. Most Ottoman-era bathhouses in Bulgaria were transformed, redesigned, renovated, and renamed, but they are essential institutions that are central to many local narratives, especially in areas with hot mineral springs. Similar to Banya, old Ottoman baths continue to shape the local environment and community identity in Velingrad and Dolna Banya, where they remain in use, integrated into both new political contexts and modern buildings. Furthermore, even bathhouses built in later periods in Bulgaria often followed the Ottoman model to

some extent, enabling the transmission of living practices and perpetuating Ottoman heritage. Kyustendil provides a notable example in this regard: the monumental Çifte Banya, constructed in 1913, blends Ottoman traditions with local authorities' ambitions to transform the town into a "European" thermal resort.

The town of Razgrad, Northeastern Bulgaria, offers another – more contentious – perspective on Ottoman heritage inscribed into the urban fabric. At its heart stands a 17th-century mosque, intrinsically linked to the town's origins (Kiel, 1991). While much of Razgrad has been transformed over time, the mosque remains one of the few surviving Ottoman vestiges. For the local Turkish community that constitutes more than half of the region's population, the mosque holds particular significance, functioning as both a spiritual centre and a marker of cultural continuity. Its monumental architecture leaves a lasting impression on residents and visitors alike, as reflected in personal memories:

> *Back then, when I came in 1977,* […] *I came to study here, the first thing that caught my attention was the mosque. I hadn't seen a mosque that big before – it was so different from the one in* [my] *village, such a huge and impressive building.* (F., in her 60s, Razgrad, 26. 8. 2019)

Such individual recollections highlight the mosque's enduring presence, not just as a historical artefact, but as a representation of Razgrad, embedded in the community's sense of place. They also reflect the impact of Ottoman architecture on local understandings of inheritance, monumentality and aesthetics.

> *What's important is that whoever comes to the town, tourists or our friends, everyone stops to take a picture in front of the mosque.* […] *The first thing they do is head to the mosque and take photos. It's a real tourist spot for us, so to speak. It should be maintained accordingly.* (S., in her 60s, Razgrad, 26. 8. 2019)

These accounts include a critique of the neglect of Ottoman heritage. Despite its status as a declared cultural monument, the mosque was abandoned for decades, fenced off and rendered inaccessible. During our fieldwork in 2019, we encountered similar concerns, marked by a palpable fear that the mosque might face the same fate as other Ottoman-era buildings.

> *The point is to maintain it, right, and to keep it. We can't keep everything old – that's also clear. We can't just live surrounded by ruins. Naturally, whatever has served its time and purpose must give way to what comes next. But some iconic things…* (N., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019)

Consequently, the demolition of such edifices or their functional transformation are perceived as dispossession – a potential erosion of still-practised or remembered customs, leading to the possible oblivion of local history. When someone shares that it is shameful for the 17th-century mosque to be abandoned, they refer to "the ways people whose lives were somehow entangled with that of the building remembered the city's past" (Kornetis, Poulos, 2021).

> *I thought, for example, that the mosque was a shame. That's the word I would use. So many years of it not being operational, so many years of nothing being done, and so many years of being abandoned… And I think so because, to me, the mosque is an emblem of the town. Without diminishing the importance of other cultural monuments* […]. (I., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019)

This also highlights people's concerns that as these buildings disappear, part of their memories – encompassing individuals, places, stories and events from communal celebrations to everyday routines – may also be lost. Ottoman mosques are not solely religious sites but integral elements of the spatial and social fabric of different neighbourhoods and towns.

Furthermore, the aforementioned words of our interlocutors contain a critique towards the position of the Ottoman heritage within the AHD. This is particularly significant as it demonstrates an understanding of heritage that can conform to the boundaries of institutionally recognised cultural heritage but can also transcend and contest them. People's sense of inheritance from the past is not entirely shaped by educational and heritage institutions and their politics of display. In fact, quite the opposite can be true – individuals' perceptions of what merits preservation and their active involvement in practices of care may reveal counter-hegemonic perspectives.

The marginalisation of Ottoman heritage parallels the marginalisation of Muslim communities, who have faced various forms of discrimination and assimilation since the establishment of the modern Bulgarian state. This is why, for the Muslims in Razgrad, it is clear that the mosque is unlikely to ever function as a place of worship again: *"It's absurd for those in power to accept it in the city centre!"* (F., in her 60s, Razgrad, 26. 8. 2019). Although the building was fully restored in 2024, its future purpose remains uncertain. It is anticipated that, like other mosques in Bulgaria and the Balkans, it will be transformed into a cultural centre or a museum.

The following quote from an interview demonstrates the painful understanding that the heritage politics directly reflects the fact that certain groups (in our case, people of Turkish origin and Muslim faith) are often positioned outside the body of the nation, just as the Ottoman heritage is excluded from the national heritage canon:

> *And the inevitable fact that there are monuments, traces, and good public benefits from Ottoman times left in Razgrad, this is also indisputable to me. Even if we don't know them. Even if we don't realise them.* […] *I'm sure that there are public benefits left from Ottoman times, for which there is no interest, no memory… These things have been erased. And I was very impressed when we went to* […] *the now restored, modernised museum, I was most impressed… There are these drawers, they are in the wall.* […] *It is interesting for children – they open the drawer and inside there are descriptions of what remained from Roman times in Razgrad.* […] *And then it dawned on me that one hundred percent there are such things remaining from Ottoman times, but no one…* […] *That's why I was so impressed now by those drawers there, so many facts left. Until one day! Why? There is nothing from the Ottoman Empire there…* (I., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019)

Such counter-voices both reclaim the Ottoman heritage and contain criticism of the heritage canon. Actually, the relationship between the AHD and the de- or re-valorisation of the Ottoman heritage is more complex. The national canon rather excludes the Ottoman heritage, and this is very clear from the fact that this heritage does not even have a proper category in the national system of chronological categorisation of historic buildings.[2] However, in some cases expert discourse is mobilised "from below" in defence of Ottoman heritage – for example, in Razgrad one can often hear that the local mosque is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, even though it is not.

The relationship between heritage and place is also enacted through specific practices of care of various local communities. As a form of heritage activism, different campaigns have emerged to preserve certain monuments, particularly through self-mobilisations of local Muslim communities. Often led by religious motives, these communities raise funds for repairs and restoration, transcending national and religious boundaries. In other instances, residents regularly gather to clean mosques and their surroundings, which are frequently defaced with vulgar graffiti. In many cases, those involved invoke a sense of duty to protect the heritage bequeathed to them, drawing on the Islamic understanding of the *waqf*'s legacy.

Nevertheless, these practices should not be viewed solely through a religious lens. A recent example offers an important and different perspective: the civic mobilisation in Sofia's Knyazhevo neighbourhood, where residents are actively protesting the authorities' plan to demolish the former Ottoman bathhouse located next to a mineral spring. Megan Krasteva (2024) illustrates how the bathhouse is valued by the

[2] Ottoman monuments are designated as either mediaeval or *vazrozhendski* (that is, related to the so-called Bulgarian Revival of the 18–19th century).

community – not only as the oldest building in the area and a significant part of local history, but also as a site intertwined with residents' personal biographies and facing the threat of extinction. This threat has successfully mobilised local citizens, strengthening community bonds, fostering civic participation, and shaping shared visions for the neighbourhood's future, with the Ottoman thermal heritage serving as a unifying element. During a 2024 protest, demonstrators even raised the slogan "Many institutions, a single Ottoman bath in Sofia!!!"

Interwoven family histories and personal attachments

Related to the regional and local scales are numerous family and individual attachments to the Ottoman heritage. They often manifest in memories offering alternative or complementary perspectives to the AHD. Ottoman-era mosques, for instance, appear as vehicles of personal meanings, transcending mere religious or historical designations. They encapsulate people's memories of their past and can thus be seen as valued heritage by those who recount their own history in relation to these edifices.

Returning to the mosque in Razgrad, we can also view it through the lens of a heritage inscribed in and made meaningful by personal and collective biographies. This perspective is captured in the following narrative:

> *I have a very good memory of that.* […] *And they asked me to take a group of children from my former school,* […] *and to be like an assistant to the teacher.* […] *When we entered the mosque with the children, with the said teacher – it was wonderful! That's how I felt, I was 11 years old.* […] *I had to prepare something, like information about the mosque. And I told the kids, and the teacher told the kids, that was all, you know. That's in my memory. But I remember when I walked into the mosque, I gasped. It was very beautiful! It really was!* (I., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019)

Ottoman heritage thus intertwines monumental imagery, religious belonging, and personal connections. This understanding is powerfully conveyed in a reflection on the individual attachment to the mosque:

> *For me the connection comes… At the time I'm talking about, I was a child, right… Fasting, Ramadan was observed in a way… much more strictly than now. And so, my grandmother observed Ramadan…* oruç.[3] *And now when 7–8 o'clock comes, when it was summer time,* […]

[3] The word in Turkish for religious fasting.

> *you're playing outside, and she's like, "Go see if the candles are lit on [the mosque] over there!" And somehow, that memory perhaps makes my attitude more special. Because I have a direct connection. Others may have just walked by. But I am connected. And so now, for me the mosque is my grandmother…* […] *So my feeling towards the building is also… And it's also a kind of belonging. It affects you.* (N., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019)

This nostalgic reminiscence intricately weaves personal memories and family ties with the physical presence of the religious and heritage site. Despite not strictly practising Islam, our interlocutor's recollection of her grandmother's observance of Ramadan reveals an intimate – direct – connection: *"I haven't been inside. It was just to see if it was time for dinner, right, for* iftar.[4] […] *And the building is beautiful. Uniquely beautiful!"* (N., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019). This surpasses spiritual traditions and religious or architectural significance, imbuing the mosque with layers of familial history and individual understandings of heritage:

> *The mosque, yes, in a way I do profess a religion, and it cannot be left out of the whole thing.* […] *For me specifically, there's no obstacle to where I'd go and read my prayer. I can do it anywhere, and I mostly don't need a building for that. But already as some connection with my grandmother, with my great-grandmother, yes, it matters to me.* (N., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019)

Such intertwining of personal narratives with architectural remnants portrays heritage not just as a historical representation, but as mundane and ritual practices embedded into familial life. The mosque, therefore, functions not as a static relic but as an elusive emotional continuum, connecting people to moments shared with their ancestors and fostering a sense of belonging. In this way, it is inscribed into a "register" of personal heritage – a collection of selected sites, objects and memories with special meanings:

> *When you go through your chest of drawers, you'd keep one thing from your grandmother. You can't keep her whole life… But there is one thing that… I have a watch.* […] *And my whole connection, right, with those before me is this watch.* (N., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019)

Just like the inherited watch, the mosque serves as a "reservoir of memory" (Apaydin, 2020: 17), ensuring continuity between generations and mediating a connection

[4] The first meal eaten after sunset during Ramadan.

with ancestors. Consequently, an apprehension about the irreversible loss of heritage exists – a sentiment grounded in the belief that the disappearance of an object entails the erasure of a segment of one's biography.

In some communities, this anxiety is amplified as discussions about heritage sites inevitably intertwine with memories about the Bulgarian state's marginalising policies, which have often denied Muslims' cultural and religious rights over the course of time. Although this was not our focus, reflections on heritage among ethnic Turks and Muslims frequently evoked such traumatic experiences. Stories collected during our fieldwork recall forced name changes from Turkish-Arabic to Bulgarian, periodic expulsions that disrupted regional social structures, attempts at forced Christianisation, demolition of buildings and even old Muslim cemeteries. These memories represent deep-seated family traumas, transmitted across generations and echoing a legacy of intergenerational pain (Trupia, 2022).

Furthermore, emotional connections with Ottoman heritage are not restricted to monumental buildings, as defined by the AHD, but relate to intimate places and traditional practices. The latter unveil another facet of Ottoman heritage, particularly evident among Turkish migrants from Bulgaria to Turkey due to the assimilation policies of the Bulgarian socialist state. Imamoglu and Ferad (2018) underline that family houses, fountains and other religious and secular sites function as collective memory *topoi* that affect community identities, shape current perceptions of the past, and nurture an affinity with the "ancestral land". According to the authors, a prayer or a contemplation at a secluded *türbe* or an old fountain reach deeper layers of belonging than official monuments and commemorations.

Expanding the exploration of the Ottoman heritage at personal and familial scales requires broadening the scope to include the experiences of non-Muslim populations. The Ottoman Empire's multiethnic and multireligious social structure created shared spaces and practices where communities of diverse backgrounds interacted, leaving a rich legacy that still resonates on individual and collective levels. The hydrothermal heritage of the village Banya offers an illustration of this phenomenon, showing how Ottoman heritage is embedded in specific local infrastructures, everyday practices and communal interactions. The memories of elder inhabitants who recall the Ottoman baths as an integral part of their daily lives provide an example of how such heritage sites are experienced in a living context, and thus inscribed into personal histories:

> Author: *Have you ever used the old baths?*
> – *Yes, we've used them.* […] *Both baths were open earlier.*
> – […] *As a child, I used to bathe in the Roman one, the Bulgarian one – the upper one. I didn't bathe in the lower one. Although, when I was little, they might have bathed me there because that's where women used to wash* [clothes].

– *When we were living down in the Lower mahalla,* [we used to bathe] *in the Turkish one. Later,* [we used] *it together with the Roman one. Both were working.*
Author: *What was the difference between them?*
– *There wasn't any difference – it was just about which one was closer.*
– *You'd go inside, the stones were warm, water running everywhere, warm, nice.* (fieldnotes, Banya, 4. 9. 2022)

This perspective views the baths as key elements of everyday heritage, aligning with broader narratives that remember and value Ottoman contributions to local history. Here is another typical story about one of the old Ottoman baths, before they were rebranded as "Bulgarian" ("Roman") or "Turkish":

This was the Old Bath, we used to bathe here. There was a big spout in it. It's still there… A huge one… The pool [is] *not very big,* [with] *a square* [shape]. *There are about six or seven little troughs around it. Women would sit by the troughs and each one would pour with a can.* […] *And the bath is still standing, restored, it's not destroyed. So why won't they let people bathe in it anymore?* […] *Otherwise, this was the Old Bath. That's how we knew it. The Old Bath.* […] *But I was so keen to go for a bath, you have no idea.* […] *It's that spout like… There's pure mineral water running all the time, you can imagine how pleasant it was.* (M., in her 60s, Banya, 7.9.2022)

Here, the pleasure of visiting the bath – also a sensorial and gendered experience (cf. Aksit, 2011) – is intertwined with a lament over its current disuse. This highlights how heritage can feel diminished when its practical and social functions are disrupted, even if the physical structure remains intact. The renaming of the bath reflects the complexities of Ottoman heritage reinterpretations, where sites are often reframed to align with shifting political contexts or cultural conventions. Despite these changes, the interlocutor's consistent reference to it as the "Old Bath" suggests resistance to such efforts, emphasising a personal and community-based perspective that prioritises lived experience over official designations: "*We used to call it the Old Bath. Why did they rename it – Roman Bath, Turkish Bath, I don't know"* (M., in her 60s, Banya, 7. 9. 2022).

As these narratives demonstrate, bathhouses are an important example because their use shows an appreciation of Ottoman heritage that is both widespread and contrasting the AHD. As mentioned earlier, the case of Banya is not unique, but rather a common one. In some places in the Balkans, and in Bulgaria in particular, living traditions related to the Ottoman bathhouses persist thanks to facilities leveraging hot springs and despite the rise of luxury spas. They are also associated with some of

the most important moments in individuals' life, and among certain communities the bridal bathing before the wedding is still observed. Communal bathing thus transcends mere hygiene. These gatherings offer spaces for leisure, relaxation, and socialisation, fostering connections among people of various ethnicities, ages, classes, and sexual orientations. With their specific social biographies (Macaraig, 2019), bathhouses are deeply inscribed in family and personal histories. Many of our interlocutors fondly remember going to the local bathhouse with their parents or grandparents during their childhood, and later continuing this tradition with their own children. Some of them recall the weekly family visits to the bathhouse, often followed by a meal out, a fresh drink or a visit to the local market. Personal stories vividly depict these experiences, portraying a spectrum of emotions ranging from eager anticipation to a sense of duty. From today's perspective, these stories are told with nostalgia about cherished moments of familial intimacy and shared companionship.

Through such everyday practices, individuals "establish new relations with a forgotten Ottoman history and transform old relations with the city on a daily basis" (Aksit, 2011: 278). Some interlocutors highlight the inheritance of the bathing facilities and practices from Ottoman times. When they describe their "Turkish bath" as "the most beautiful" due to its comfort and intimacy, this demonstrates a form of a valorisation, or even a romanticisation, of Ottoman heritage. While people emphasise that visiting the bath is a "Turkish ritual" or talk about their experience in it with popular Bulgarianised versions of Turkish words, this also indexically alludes to the vestiges of the Ottoman multicultural ecumene.

Furthermore, fieldwork among various communities reveals different and often contradictory perceptions of the material and intangible aspects of this heritage. While some acknowledge the Ottoman origin of bathhouses and bathing customs, others tend to deny any "Oriental" connections through strategies of Romanisation or Bulgarisation. In all cases, however, there are continuous processes of (re-)appropriation of baths, bathing, and thermal waters that imply heritagisation. This form of valorisation also contrasts the general contestation of the Ottoman past and challenges the national AHD through a myriad of vernacular discourses and practices. Some of the collected narratives and personal stories explicitly challenge hegemonic discourses. When discussing the remaining material traces, people often reflect on the developed water infrastructures, distribution systems, bathhouses and fountains, thus openly questioning the dominant "catastrophe theory". Others go further to include stories about the importance of hygiene and purity in the Ottoman Empire, criticising the hierarchical position of "Europe" as a universal civilisational model constructed in opposition to the supposedly backward East.

Discussion and conclusion

A recent study on "problematic cultural heritage in the context of tourism" postulates that "problematic heritage in Bulgaria boils down to two main categories" – namely Ottoman and communist heritages (Dogramadjieva, 2024: 50). This perspective reflects a broader view that ties heritage dissonance primarily to those historical heritages "that have left the deepest imprint on the region's multilayered identity: the Byzantine, the Ottoman, and the communist/socialist" (Dragićević Šešić, Rogač Mijatović, 2014: 14). This aligns with the understanding that "significant parts of the heritage of the Balkans became 'dissonant heritage'" due to the "stigmatization of the entire region as 'non-European'" (Dragićević Šešić, Rogač Mijatović, 2014: 13). While we agree with the critique of the essentialist "Balkans" – "Europe" divide that shapes local notions of value, we argue that framing Ottoman (Byzantine or socialist) heritage as exclusively or intrinsically dissonant and problematic limits the research scope and constrains the understanding of heritage-making. Such an approach, while adopting critical heritage studies concepts and (nominally) challenging the AHD, inadvertently reinforces the stigmatisation of Ottoman heritage. It reiterates the already authorised dissonance ascribed to Ottoman heritage in public discourse and national historiographies, confining it to the problem of its seemingly natural dissonance – without necessarily explaining this dissonance or relating it to other heritages' dissonances, which are instead often interpreted as unproblematic.[5]

Our paper highlighted some of the various scales at which Ottoman heritage is reclaimed, demonstrating that it exists beyond this authorised dissonance. This broadening shift toward a polyphony of memories, narratives, and practices of engagement and valorisation is what we understand as a downscaling approach. While acknowledging that the grand narrative of the nation often dismisses Ottoman heritage's historical or representational value, it also focuses on the gaps within this narrative or the reactions against it. As Harvey (2015: 3) underlines, while the AHD is still present, "[t]he mechanisms through which such a discourse operates, however, appear to be more elusive and less structural". The latter perspective highlights the existence of alternative and sometimes counter-hegemonic visions, where expressions of local identity, community belonging, family memory, and personal attachments intersect. These alternatives contest – whether explicitly or implicitly – the dissonance attributed to Ottoman heritage. This approach points to zones of "cultural intimacy" and transcends popular dualisms and polarities, treating – in Herzfeld's (2016: 6) words – "'top' and 'bottom' as but two of a host of refractions of a broadly shared *cultural engagement*".

Complicating these notions, we must emphasise that – despite their power imbalances – there is not a strict opposition between the dominant discourse and other

[5] See also Kisić (2016) for a discussion on heritage dissonance.

perceptions of Ottoman heritage, viewing the former as purely erasing and the latter as inherently valorising. Both the examples of Razgrad and Banya for instance confirm that "[w]hile the dominating heritage discourses seek to control the meanings and practices of heritage on the scale 'below' it, heritage is at the same time created by the actors representing these 'lower' scales" (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019: 11). Just as institutions and experts sometimes mobilise the AHD to defend specific Ottoman buildings from various threats, so too can local communities or individuals advocate for the demolition of monuments or employ de-Ottomanising strategies.

In this sense, the article has several limitations. It is challenging, within the scope of an overview, to adequately capture the myriad situations, positions, and motives from which different forms of Ottoman heritage valorisation emerge. Additionally, while there are many parallels across Balkan countries, the specific national contexts and their dynamic AHDs must be taken into account. Furthermore, as the significance of Ottoman heritage extends beyond national borders, the transnational scale must also be considered. In this regard, an "upscaling" approach is needed as well.

Nevertheless, the varied scales presented here reveal a landscape of Ottoman heritage marked by a broad spectrum of intricate, often ambiguous and conflicting meanings. Despite the complexities, it is important that there are voices advocating for the recognition that *"these are Bulgarian heritages – both Roman and Byzantine, both Thracian and Ottoman"* (A., in his 30s, Gotse Delchev, 18. 8. 2019). By narrating their individual or family biographies, our interlocutors also reclaim the Ottoman past as a layer of Bulgarian history, framing it as an integral part of the national heritage: *"Heritage is that* […] *which has been bequeathed and left to us from our ancestors, no matter whether it was Bulgarian, Turkish, Jewish"* (Z., in his 40s, Razgrad, 28. 8. 2019).

Following this renegotiation of the AHD, the idea of continuity between the different layers of national heritage is articulated, with Ottoman heritage emerging as an expression of *"a mixture of architectures"* and *"something that has been"*, *"layer upon layer, yes… It's like that. There is nothing that comes out of the blue"* (N., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019). These reflections on heritage-making underscore its intentional selectivity, perceived as deliberate actions that shape and discipline national subjects: *"The question is what we preserve, how we preserve it, what we take from it, in what way… what we use it for: whether to build on it or use it to set things against each other"* (N., in her 40s, Razgrad, 27. 8. 2019). This consciousness among Turks and Muslims in Bulgaria cannot be separated from the construction of heritage, and is further intertwined with the relations of domination between Orthodox Christianity and Islam (Tocheva, 2023). As heritage is perceived through individual or community memories and connections, the erasure of the Ottoman heritage is not merely an abstraction but a procedure disciplining individuals or entire communities (Mattioli, 2013).

Such reflections emphasise the interconnectedness of *"Bulgarian and Turkish* […] *because both ethnic groups live in Bulgaria…"* (S., in her 60s, Razgrad, 26. 8. 2019).

And further, *"they live together. And we are heirs, as they say, of one culture. And we share everything with each other. In the end, we have nothing so much to divide"* (F., in her 60s, Razgrad, 26. 8. 2019). Undoubtedly, these positions are heterogeneous and often internally contradictory. Nonetheless, they reveal significant layers within Bulgaria's heritage, offering insights into the cleavages within the dominant discourse and highlighting the potential for heritage-remaking. While our focus was on Muslim communities due to the intersectional implications, the research uncovered connections that transcend ethno-confessional boundaries. Shared anxieties about the fate of monuments, sadness over irreversible losses, fear of future collapses, efforts to prevent them, anger at their neglect, and frustration with the oblivion of historical sites and facts all testify to a collective attachment to the traces of the past. Underlying these entanglements, we can assume the existence of heirs to Ottoman heritage who possess the agency to reimagine and reclaim it as valuable. Their diverse perspectives contribute to a more nuanced and inclusive portrayal of heritage, emphasising its contemporary relevance and evolving nature. They also remind us that categorising a particular heritage as dissonant already reflects existing power hierarchies, affecting not only the material aspects of that heritage but also the lived experiences of its communities.

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Pozabljeno, preimenovano, ponovno pridobljeno: bolgarska osmanska dediščina onkraj avtoriziranega neskladja

V raziskavi je obravnavana kompleksna navzočnost osmanske dediščine na širšem postosmanskem balkanskem območju, s posebnim poudarkom na Bolgariji. Avtorja se zavzemata za drugačen pristop, ki spodbija pogled avtoriziranega dediščinskega diskurza, ki osmansko dediščino večkrat marginalizira in jo obravnava kot disonantno. Osmanska preteklost, ki je pogosto obravnavana kot obdobje uničenja brez kulturne vrednosti, je bila predmet zanemarjanja, brisanja ali preoblikovanja, kar je odsev širših nacionalističnih prizadevanj. V raziskavi je poudarjena alternativna perspektiva, osredinjena na glasove in prakse, ki osmansko dediščino ponovno razpirajo, si jo prisvajajo in na novo zamišljajo. Razkriva, kako posamezniki, družine in skupnosti dejavno vrednotijo domnevno zavrnjeno dediščino ter poudarjajo njeno spreminjajočo se vlogo in pomen. Z uporabo skalarnega pristopa so preučena različna dojemanja dediščine na nacionalni, lokalni, družinski in osebni ravni. Medtem ko nacionalni diskurz pogosto stigmatizira osmansko dediščino, ji lokalne in vernakularne prakse vdihujejo novo življenje ter jo vključujejo v pripovedi o skupni zgodovini in pripadnosti. Politično in družbeno marginalizirane skupnosti imajo tako dejavno vlogo pri redefiniranju osmanske dediščine kot sestavnega dela nacionalne dediščine. Na podlagi antropološkega terenskega dela na več lokacijah je razvidno, da osmanska dediščina ni statična ali monolitna entiteta, temveč jo je treba obravnavati kot dinamičen mozaik na presečišču dominantnih in vernakularnih diskurzov, disonanten, izpogajan in vedno znova reinterpretiran. V razpravi sta poudarjena večplastna in mnogoglasna narava ustvarjanja dediščine ter premislek o bolj vključujočem razumevanju osmanske dediščine v Bolgariji in na Balkanu.

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"Wastelanding" Heritage on the Margins: Reflections from the Cases of the Sorbs in Lusatia and the Vlachs in the Timok Valley

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This article adopts a comparative focus on two European borderlands, that of the Sorbs in Germany and that of the Vlachs in Serbia. It identifies three dimensions of marginalization that precede the loss of ecoculturally diverse landscapes through the expansion of mining activities: linguistic difference, border proximity, and the element of a rural culture. The article argues that these are part of a discourse that aims to legitimize the processes of "wastelanding", that is the deliberate destruction of minority heritage through environmental degradation.

▪ **Keywords**: Sorbian minority in Germany, Vlach minority in Serbia, ecocultural heritage, environmental degradation, endangered languages

Članek primerja dve evropski obmejni območji, tj. območji naselitve Lužiških Srbov v Nemčiji in Vlahov v Srbiji. Opredeljuje tri razsežnosti marginalizacije, ki zaradi širjenja rudarskih dejavnosti napovedujejo izgubo ekološko in kulturno raznovrstnih (po)krajin. To so jezikovni razločki, bližina meje in podeželska kultura, ki so del diskurza, katerega cilj je legitimirati procese »pustošenja«, tj. namernega uničevanja manjšinske dediščine z degradacijo okolja.

▪ **Ključne besede**: lužiškosrbska manjšina v Nemčiji, vlaška manjšina v Srbiji, ekokulturna dediščina, degradacija okolja, ogroženi jeziki

Introduction: Context, history, and culture of Sorbian and Vlach communities

Research on the destruction of native environments of indigenous and aboriginal peoples worldwide is a topic that has attracted much attention by both scientific researchers and the media (see Scheidel et al., 2023). Yet, surprisingly, very little is known about the fate of indigenous/traditional minority groups' ecologies in Europe, with the general perception that such issues do not affect our continent.

Against this backdrop, this article emphasizes the importance of ecocultural issues taking place on the so-called margins of Europe, identified as minority and linguistic settings characterized by remoteness from central, dominant culture, and marginalized by it, where environmental histories were problematic both during communism (Kirchhof Mignon, Mc Neill, 2019) and in the transition to capitalism (Pavlínek, Pickles, 2000), and continue to have direct impact in post-communist societies. It focuses on the history of ethnic minorities (defined as social groups in a given country who are numerically smaller than the majority group, and possess specific linguistic, ethnic, or religious characteristics which are distinct from the dominant ones in their state context;

see OHCHR, 2010) that seem to have been largely excluded from the debate on environmental change. Furthermore, it addresses the practices and discourses of minorities living in proximity to border regions, which, due to linguistic differences and multilingual repertoires, contribute to questioning the supposed fixity and homogeneity of narratives about national heritage (Ledinek Lozej, Pisk, 2021: 80). With regard to the processes of heritage creation, in the construction of meanings and values in relation to specific tangible and intangible cultural elements, it is the context rather than the object of heritage itself to constitute the focus of research. Heritage is thus understood as a "present social action or process" (Fakin Bajec, 2013: 2) which, although linked to its meaning in the past, generates consequences for the present and contributes to shaping the future (Harrison et al., 2008).

Issues related to the preservation of minorities' heritage in Central and Eastern Europe, as in the rest of the world, cannot be considered in isolation from the analysis of the material/ecological environment (Edmonds, 2021) in which minority groups live and the social factors that influence their existence. In line with this, I define ecocultural[1] heritage (UNESCO, 1995) as the connection of minorities' cultural heritage with their surrounding ecological environment (Cocks, Wiersum, 2014). I interpret this term as corresponding to "a wide range of life forms and ecosystems that have been shaped and influenced by human cultural activities within specific geographical spaces" (Zhao et al., 2024), and thus encompassing traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, folklore, skills, memories and practices relating to the environment. Consequently, ecocultural heritage is considered part of the culture of minority groups who have inhabited rural areas for centuries and practiced sustainable forms of livelihood that depend on nature and its resources. In this article, I highlight the various factors that have facilitated processes of marginalization of Sorbian and Vlach minorities, interpreted as socio-political processes consisting in the "peripheralization of individuals and groups from a dominant, central majority" (Hall, 1999: 89). In particular, I focus on the treatment of ethnic minorities' culture and language as insignificant or peripheral, implying their exclusion from the centralized discourse of prestige and reflecting a dichotomist understanding of the relations between an imagined "centre" and the "peripheries". I argue that such processes enable the unfolding of processes of "wastelanding" (Brynne Voyles, 2015) of their territories in terms of ecocultural heritage destruction.

In this first introductory section, I provide brief background information on the two minority groups, their history, language, and religious affiliation. In the second section, I deal with the discrimination of these two communities in linguistic terms, while in the third section I address the issue of border proximity and the rural component of their culture. In the fourth section, I deal with the effects of environmental degradation

[1] Instead of "biocultural", see Franco, 2022. This term – ecocultural – has been used in recent years by Tomblin (2009) and others to describe the goals of indigenous restoration.

and its impact on the traditional ecocultural heritage of the communities. In the final section, I briefly summarize my findings. This article presents the preliminary results of my research project Minor Echoes, started in September 2023. I follow a multidisciplinary approach based on a qualitative analysis of local literature, media reports and local accounts (mainly selected according to the principle of giving voice to members of minority groups themselves on the matters that regard them) as well as ethnographic fieldwork. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with around a dozen community members: inhabitants of villages affected by mining as well as environmental and minority rights activists in two different phases, both in Lusatia (in March 2024 and September 2024) and in Eastern Serbia (in April 2024 and October 2024).

The Sorbs of Lusatia in Germany

The Sorbs are considered the smallest Slavic people to have lived on the territory of present-day Germany since around 600 AD. The Sorbs, also known as "Wends", historically settled mainly in what is now Lusatia, the eastern part of Germany, as well as in areas corresponding to what is now western Poland and the northern part of the Czech Republic. Today, the German region of Lusatia is divided between the federal states of Brandenburg and Saxony. At the end of the 19th century, almost the entire population of the villages in this region was Sorbian (Hose, Keller, 2002: 60), and until the mid-1950s, Sorbian in its two variants was the common means of communication (Norberg, 1996: 120). The material and immaterial heritage of the Lusatian Sorbs is diverse and includes the Lusatian log construction as a form of folk architecture (Hose, Keller, 2002: 61), the typical half-timbered house, the bird wedding, Easter riding and a highly refined tradition of Easter egg painting. Before the expansion of the mining industry in the 1950s, the Sorbian economy was primarily based on agriculture and handicrafts. The language, traditional costumes, and religious beliefs differ in the two regions. In Upper Lusatia, some Sorbian settlements have maintained a strong Catholic identity, while in Lower Lusatia Protestantism is more widespread. The Sorbian languages in their two varieties, Lower and Upper Sorbian, are endangered (Eberhard et al., 2024). Since ethnic statistics are prohibited in Germany, there are no exact data on the number of Sorbs or Sorbian speakers today, but it is estimated that the number of speakers has fallen from a total of around 111,000 (German Census 1910, cited in Mercator, 2022) to 7,000 speakers of Lower Sorbian and 25,000 of Upper Sorbian in the last years (Brežan, Nowak, 2016: 11).

The Vlachs of the Timok Valley in Eastern Serbia

The Vlach minority in Serbia lives in the Timok Valley in the eastern part of the country near the Romanian and Bulgarian borders. The Vlachs have been present there since the 18th century (Ćirković, 2007), with some claiming "indigenous" status, while others identify as Romanians (OCSE, 2008: 25; Sorescu-Marinković, Huțanu, 2023: 29).

The Vlachs were traditionally a rural population that can be divided into the Țarani, the lowlanders (mainly farmers), and the Ungureni, the highlanders (mainly shepherds). The Vlachs are Orthodox Christians and speak varieties of Daco-Romanian, consisting of archaic Oltenian and Banat dialects. This language variety is now considered endangered (Sorescu-Marinković et al., 2021: 75). Census data show that the number of Vlachs whose mother tongue was Vlach has decreased by a factor of four in just 60 years: in 1961 there were 106,656, in 2022 only 23,216 (Serbian Census, 2022).

Vlach culture, associated with traditional economic activities such as agriculture, beekeeping, viticulture, sheep and cattle breeding, but also fold panning, milling, weaving and sewing (Sorescu-Marinković, Huțanu, 2023: 148), still lives on today in the use of musical instruments, in Vlach dances and in folk costumes. The influence of the natural environment on Vlach culture is traceable for example in folk songs, whose formulas preserve phytonyms that reflect part of the traditional ecological knowledge of the past (Sikimić, 2021). The traditional magic and rituals of the Vlachs are also important elements of their cultural heritage which relates to nature.

Discrimination, marginalization, and assimilation patterns towards minority language speakers

In the 20th century, the cultural heritage of national, ethnic and religious minorities in Central and Eastern Europe was subject to various processes of exclusion and in various cases treated as peripheral, insignificant, unimportant or "dissonant" (Kisić, 2016). This led to forms of "assimilation, persecution, and even oblivion" (Kocój, 2015). In some cases, minorities' heritage was destroyed or "sacrificed" in order to supposedly benefit the majority group. As for the Sorbs and the Vlachs, the patterns of marginalization and degradation of their ecocultural heritage show some striking similarities.

Lignite mining operations in Lusatia, which began in 1924, have brought social and demographic changes with lasting ethnic effects. It has resulted in the demolition of 137 villages (Archiv Verschwundener Orte, 2010), with around 29,000 people (Berkner, 2022: 35) affected by development, displacement and resettlement processes (Terminski, 2012). The process reached its peak during the German Democratic Republic (GDR) period between 1970 and 1990, when the mines were owned by the public company VEB Glückauf Knappenrode (Jacobs, 2021: 213). Nevertheless, even after the democratic change in Germany, further villages such as Horno and Lakoma (Koch, 2020) were destroyed by the Swedish multinational Vattenfall in the early 2000. The resettlement of the population undermined the vitality of Sorbian culture (Barker, 2009; Barthold, 2021), brought new assimilation dynamics into play, and fragmented the basis of the ecocultural heritage. However, Lusatia was not the only region of the GDR impacted by lignite mining; towns in central Germany were also affected (Berkner, 2022).

In Eastern Serbia, mining activities, which began in 1903 in the town of Bor (Stojmenović, 2023), contributed to the degradation of the natural environment, a fact which had negative consequences for the Vlach communities living in the area. Of historical relevance is the fact that the so-called Vlaška Buna ("Vlach Revolt") against the then French-owned mines (Stojmenović, 2024) took place in Bor in 1935, which is considered the first environmental uprising in Europe. The rapid expansion of operations since 2018 (as will be explained in more detail) with the takeover of the formerly state-owned mine by the Chinese multinational Zijin seriously threatens the remaining elements of the traditional way of life in the region, and the abandonment of the affected area by the villagers is eroding the cohesion of the Vlach community and its chances of surviving as a distinct socio-cultural entity. For both the Sorbs and the Vlachs, the destruction of their natural and material environment was preceded by a long history of marginalization, attempts at assimilation, and the neglect of their cultural heritage, especially their language.

The Sorbian minority: Germanization and assimilation attempts

In the German context, the relationship with the Sorbian population began to deteriorate in the 19th century, in parallel to the emergence of a romanticized notion of the German nation, through which the Sorbs became "the others" (Hagemann, 2022: 13). During the Bismarck Empire, the Sorbian minority was oppressed and repeatedly discriminated against. The low prestige of this language (Norberg, 1996) and the Germanization processes in church, state, school and society led to Sorbian being replaced by German as the spoken language in large parts of Lusatia (Bott-Bodenhausen, 1997). During the National Socialist era, the Lusatian Sorbian Association Domowina, founded in Hoyerswerda in 1912, was banned and Sorbian place names in 16 villages in the same district were Germanized in 1936/1937 (Laschewski et al., 2021: 27). In addition, Sorbian children at school who spoke Sorbian were forced to write 100 times: "I am not allowed to speak Wendish" (Walde, 2014). This process of exclusion was reinforced by industrialization and social modernization processes, but also by the influx of German refugees after the Second World War (Kurpiel, 2020), and further became a linguistic marginalization (Jacobs, 2021: 206). In addition to these factors, the expansion of opencast lignite mines (where many members of this minority were employed) in the Sorbian areas and the resettlement of the rural population contributed to the erosion of the cultural substance in many villages and towns (Jacobs, 2021; Laschewski et al., 2021: 27), which also affected the German population. In the GDR, the Sorbs were recognized as a national minority in the constitution and officially enjoyed the status of an exemplary and state-supported community (Kurpiel, 2020). They were granted special rights, such as education in the Sorbian language and the opportunity to resume the activities of their institutions (such as the Domowina), their publishing house (Domowina Verlag, founded in 1958), and their own newspaper. The authorities

promoted Sorbian culture, albeit in a rather folkloristic way (more on this in the next chapter). The adaptation of the Sorbs to the German culture and language was promoted and also served as a link in a system of further marginalization of the Sorbian language, which was referred to as "silent Germanization" (Dippman, 1973).

After reunification, the Sorbian communities in Germany were given more cultural rights. A protocol note to the German Unification Treaty and the laws of the states of Brandenburg and Saxony explicitly protect the Sorbs and recognize their right to their homeland (Jacobs, 2021: 217). Nevertheless, it was already too late for the Sorbian language. It was noted that "in the parts of the Sorbian/Wendish settlement area that have been shaped and reshaped by opencast lignite mining in recent decades, the foundations of the Sorbian/Wendish language and culture appear to have been eroded to such an extent that one should speak not only of a reversal, but of a (partial) reconstruction or, in terms of landscape design, of a 'recultivation'" (Laschewski et al., 2021: 9). Apart from a few villages in Upper Lusatia, there are no longer any communities in which Sorbian is spoken by the majority. Indeed, the majority of Sorbs do not speak Sorbian (Jacobs, Nowak, 2020). The differences in language use between the Upper Sorbian and Lower Sorbian communities reflect the resettlement processes resulting from lignite mining: in Upper Lusatia, the settlement structure is more compact, whereas in Lower Lusatia it is more dispersed. As a result, "language use has retreated to a few islands such as family, neighbourhood, church, Sorbian institutions; language skills in everyday life have declined drastically" (Laschewski, et al., 2021: 15).

The Vlachs in Serbia: Linguistic discrimination and low prestige

The Vlach minority in the Timok Valley in eastern Serbia has been subject to attempts at assimilation since the middle of the 19th century. This was evident, for example, in the Serbianization of names, which continued into the first half of the 20th century by adding the Serbian-Slavic suffix *-ić* (Sorescu-Marinković, Huțanu, 2023: 222), as well as in the exclusion of the Vlach and Romanian languages in the ecclesiastical sphere until 2004 (Kahl, Pascaru, 2020). During the Partisan uprisings in the Second World War, the Vlachs began to use their language in writing for the first time (Sorescu-Marinković, Huțanu, 2023: 121). One example of this is the Partisan songbook published in Zaječar in 1946, a collection of poems by Janko Simeonović. The role of the newspaper *Vorba Noastră*, the first newspaper in the Vlach language published between 1945 and 1949, was also very important (Gacović, 2019: 357; Sorescu-Marinković, Huțanu, 2023: 119). However, this was only a short period of time during which the Vlachs had the illusion that they would enjoy greater minority rights. After this newspaper was discontinued, the Vlach language, in particular written, became a private matter again. The intensive phase of industrialization that began after the establishment of socialist Yugoslavia had a devastating effect on the traditional way of life (especially sheep farming) of this minority and dealt a severe blow to the traditional culture and language of the Vlachs,

in particular the lexicon. During communist rule, the state administration systematically promoted the process of linguistic assimilation through schools that did not include the minority's mother tongue in the curriculum. The Vlachs and their language, which had always had a very low prestige both within the ingroup and within the Serbian outgroup (Sorescu-Marinković, Huțanu, 2023: 34), were a taboo in school education (Durlić, 2011). Even in their own environment, the Vlachs in Serbia felt like second-class citizens and tried to preserve their ethnic identity only in the safety of their homes (Durlić, 2011: 21). Unsurprisingly, such conditions discouraged Vlach parents from passing the language onto their children, as they assumed that knowing and using the Vlach language was an expression of backwardness (Gacović, 2019: 354–355). After the collapse of Yugoslavia, it took many years for this minority to find a form of state protection. In 2002, the Vlachs were elevated from the previous category of "ethnic group" to the status of a national minority. In the same year, the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities was passed. However, it was not until the 2014/2015 school year that the Vlach language was introduced as an elective subject at some schools in eastern Serbia. In 2022, it became the official language of the country, although this language variety is still not sufficiently protected in the public sphere, including the media, school education, public administration, etc.

Border proximity, prejudices, and propaganda

The question of the peripheral location and proximity to the border, which characterizes both Lusatia and the Timok Valley, is an important aspect that influenced the fate of the Sorbian and Vlach minorities. Geographically speaking, the border regions of a state are often categorized with a pejorative connotation as "the outskirts, the frontier", being referred to different domains of social life (Korenik, Żurakowski, 2018: 30). Border regions can also be seen as "threshold areas" (Schuchardt, 2023: 178) or "contact zones" (ibid.). These transcultural spaces prove the vulnerability of the category of a supposedly homogeneous nation and at the same time provoke processes of resistance against these very categories (Selvelli, 2024). Interestingly, both Lusatia and the Timok Valley embody "triple" border regions. Lusatia borders both Poland and the Czech Republic, which also gave rise to mistrust due to the potential cross-border communication of the Sorbian minority. The same applies to the Vlachs in the Timok Valley, a region bordering Romania and Bulgaria, with the former playing an important role in national Serbian propaganda. The fact that their mother tongue belongs to a different language family than the main language of their country, coupled with their proximity to the border with a country that speaks a similar language to them, has made the Vlachs a "suspicious" element. In order to preserve the complexity of the meaning of border proximity, it is necessary to understand border regions as places positioned in a specific

time and space (anthropologist Agnieszka Pasieka quoted in Kurpiel, 2020), because "only such a standpoint allows us to take into account the socio-political context, the influence of politics, and the reaction of the inhabitants of these regions to it; and also to address the issue of inequality, discrimination, and marginalisation" (Kurpiel, 2020: 48). Border areas are also associated with the problem of distance from the prestigious centre of power and culture of the respective state, which contributes to the process of marginalization and "devaluation" of minority culture (Selvelli, 2024). Both the Sorbian heritage in Lusatia and the Vlach heritage in the Timok Valley are historically shaped by their ties to a rural landscape and culture and have been (and continue to be) severely affected by industrialization and mining. The diversity in the border regions is "accompanied by a deeply internalized awareness of which of the groups is the dominant and norm-setting one" (Kurpiel, 2020: 49). In the case of German-Sorbian and Serbian-Vlach relations, there is no doubt that the Sorbs and the Vlachs were the dependent minorities for centuries.

The Lusatian frontier: Cross-border contacts and rural identities

Lusatia is often referred to as a border region, with the Sorbs representing a national minority living close to the border. In accordance with the different positions and interests, this region has been constructed in contemporary historiographical debates over the last two centuries as a "periphery, intermediate region, border region, Slavic island, and Slavic bridgehead" (Pollack, 2016: 314, cited in Hagemann, 2023: 72). In this context, the case of Lower Lusatia, the part of the region most affected by opencast mining, can be described as a periphery of the periphery, which is now considered a marginal area within the Brandenburg settlement area of the Sorbs due to the social and demographic changes caused by environmental degradation and population resettlement (Laschewski et al., 2021). The proximity to two other Slavic-speaking countries led to cross-border cultural contacts and to an interest in the Sorbian minority in the historiography of Polish- and Czech-speaking authors (Hagemann, 2023: 77).

West Slavic intellectuals certainly developed a greater interest in the Sorbs and Lusatia than German-speaking educated elites, who tended to be rather indifferent to Sorbian culture or had a negative attitude towards it. The special geographical location also enabled the Sorbs to express their ideas in other areas beyond the border (Petr, 1987). In 1908, for example, the Sorbian intellectual Miklaws Andricki published a famous report on the Sorbian situation in Czech in the Prague journal *Slovansky Pfehled* (Lorenc, 1999) under the title 'Our Difficult Situation'. In this text, he lamented the neglect of knowledge about the Sorbs by German society, which either knew nothing about them or referred to them only as "an ethnographic peculiarity, a dying branch, a dying offshoot" (ibid.: 417). The proximity of the border was also an issue in the period after the Second World War, from 1945 to 1948, when the Sorbs tried to demand autonomy and at the same time maintain close relations with the Slavic-speaking population in

Czechoslovakia (Dippman, 1973). Indeed, after 1945, the Sorbian umbrella organization Domowina attempted to join the CSSR or Poland as an independent organization, a project that failed, as did the attempt to form an independent Sorbian party. More recently, the element of "marginality" has taken on a new transnational significance (Schuchardt, 2023: 175): for the Sorbian minority and its heritage, as in the case of the protests against the expansion of lignite mining at the expense of Sorbian villages, in which Polish activists were also involved (ibid.).

In the GDR, the Sorbian heritage, which was rooted in rural, peripheral, and non-urban contexts, was threatened by major social, ideological, and economic changes. During the industrialization that accompanied the expansion of lignite mining and created thousands of jobs, the workers who moved to Lusatia knew nothing about the culture in the region, while the local German population regarded Sorbian as a rural, pre-modern remnant culture (Hose, Keller, 2002: 67). In relation to Sorbian culture, the fracture between "modern/traditional or industrial/rural or high/folk culture is framed negatively, resulting in the Sorbian/Wendish language and culture being characterized as non-progressive and outdated" (Laschewski et al., 2021: 14). In Lusatia, the Sorbs were originally mainly farmers and craftsmen. The GDR changed this by expanding the mining industry and directly involving the Sorbian workers in the socialist development of Lusatia as a coal and energy centre. By turning them into "well-educated socialist Sorbian personalities" (Dippman, 1973: 529), there was a shift in the social status of the Sorbs. In this context, elements of Sorbian heritage such as folk art were seen as particularly worthy of promotion in the GDR, as they stood out from bourgeois intellectual art. They were thus used for the ideological project of consolidating socialism in this minority. From the late 1950s onwards, traditional folk art increasingly lost importance (Keller, Jacobs, 2023) and was replaced by the more progressive understanding of "artistic folk art" (Heiner, Häfner, 2020: 11), which was intended to help "break the backward habits and traditions" (ibid.). This also included the neutralization of elements of cultural difference in Sorbian folk culture: for example, the Christian and pagan meanings of the symbols on Easter eggs were often obscured. The House for Sorbian Folk Art in Bautzen (1956–1995) and other institutions such as the Sorbian Folklore Centres founded in 1977 in the districts of Dresden and Cottbus promoted the development and use of cultural heritage (especially folk dances, folk art) within the framework of socialist cultural policy (Keller, Jacobs, 2023). In this way, minority culture was combined with the utilitarian goal of supporting socialism in Lusatia. Sorbian authors who deviated from the official cultural policy doctrine were publicly denounced and excluded from the Sorbian public sphere. These measures were accompanied by a gradual erosion of Sorbian self-identification. While 81,000 people still described themselves as Sorbs in 1956, this figure had fallen to 48,000 by 1990 (Meškank, 2014). Today, the estimated number of Sorbs is around 60,000; 40,000 of whom live in Upper Lusatia and 20,000 in Lower Lusatia (Brežan, Nowak,

2016: 11). Despite the progress made after the democratic transition, the Serbski Sejm (Sorbian Parliament), a new political actor founded in 2018, denounces the fact that on German media "misinterpretations and distortions characterise most coverage about the Sorbs. The Sorbian view on things remains mostly excluded. The Sorbian [sic!] is mostly folklorised and hence marginalised, presented as a contrast to the German living environment" (Serbski Sejm, 2021: 42).

The Romanian factor and the prejudices against the Vlachs

In the Timok Valley, as in Lusatia, the proximity to the border(s) was (and still is) an element that influences the life of the Vlach minority. In the second half of the 19th century, the Vlachs were the largest minority in Serbia: 7.8 % of the total population in 1884 (Kolerovic, 2014: 18). Due to their geographical location, the Serbian authorities saw the Vlachs as a threat to national security (ibid.: 19). This was because the Vlachs lived not only in the immediate vicinity of the newly established Romanian state (whose population was considered by the Serbian authorities to be identical to the Vlachs), but also near the north-western region of Bulgaria, which had a significant Vlach community. However, it was only after the German invasion of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in April 1941 that the Romanian authorities officially intervened and submitted a memorandum to the Germans in which they raised the issue of autonomy for this minority group (Kolerovic, 2014: 186).

After the war, a 1948 report by the OZNA (the Yugoslav State Security Service) dealt with the situation of the Vlachs in eastern Serbia and discussed Romania's efforts to appropriate this region (Sorescu-Marinković, Huțanu, 2023: 114). The aforementioned newspaper in the Vlach language, *Vorba Noastră*, which was founded in 1945, was discontinued in 1949 because it was presumably thought that it would lead the Vlachs towards Romania (Sorescu-Marinković, Huțanu, 2023: 119). Serbian political, social and cultural propaganda in the Timok Valley attempted to weaken the Romanian and Vlach ethnic element through linguistic and ethno-cultural assimilation (Lozovanu, 2013: 405). During socialist Yugoslavia, the creation of a negative image of Romanians with pejorative implications, such as an identity that was less prestigious than Serbian or Yugoslav, was also linked to the country's better socio-economic development compared to Romania. In the early 2000s, new Vlach political formations were greeted in the press with accusations of a possible secession of the region and its annexation to the "Romanian motherland" (Durlić, 2011: 25; Gacović, 2019: 17–18). This prejudice persisted in the years that followed. The concession of the Bor and Majdanpek mines to the Chinese multinational company Zijin in 2018 triggered a new dynamic. For example, the Vlachs from the Timok Valley affected by mining in the Bor region launched a protest in the Romanian city of Craiova in the winter of 2024, demanding support from the Romanian authorities, Serbia, and the European Union (Profit, 2024).

Similar to the Sorbs in Lusatia, the Vlachs in the Timok Valley in Serbia were a predominantly rural population. The natural environment shaped the traditional folklore repertoire of this minority, which can be seen in the local folk songs and traditional musical instruments such as the *bušen* (or *rikalo*), a trumpet made by shepherds from linden bark or willow trees to make it easier to call from one hill to another as they drove their flocks to pasture (Perić, 2020). The original folk music lived for centuries in meadows, pastures and rural villages and embodied a form of ecocultural heritage. Since the 1960s/1970s, however, newly composed Vlach folk music has been promoted in Yugoslavia (Gacović, 2019: 61). The increasing commercialization processes in music had a "degenerative impact on the ethnic heterogeneity of Yugoslav music" (Vidić Rasmussen, 1995: 241) and to a certain extent attempted to neutralize the rural element through an urban conception of culture (ibid.: 242). Similar processes took place with traditional Vlach dances, which were popularized by the majority population as an element of entertainment, without this signifying any real interest in Vlach culture. The Vlach traditions associated with superstition and magic (Sikimić, 2002) and their non-Slavic language have contributed to the fact that the members of this community, as elsewhere in the Balkans, are seen as "the others" par excellence, if one excludes the Turks (Jezernik, 2010). As has already been said: "Vlach was and remains the closest foreigner and the most foreign neighbour" (Botica, 2007: 67). The term *vlaj*, a variation of *vlah*, has been used as a pejorative term, synonymous with "ignorant", "culturally inferior" (ibid.: 65), and the Vlach ethnic identity is often associated with that of a "shepherd", "peasant", i.e. more or less explicitly backward. As evidenced from recent facts[2] this negative attitude has remained to this day, sometimes hidden, sometimes quite open, as for example in the texts of the tabloid media (Euronews Srbija, 2024). It is therefore not surprising that many Vlachs still do not declare themselves as such in the official census (personal interviews with local villagers in Oštrelj).

Motives for ecocultural heritage destruction: Wastelanding

For the Sorbian minority in Lusatia and the Vlach minority in the Timok Valley, mining (lignite and copper respectively) is synonymous with extreme consequences, albeit to different degrees, in the form of environmental degradation and pollution that threaten the local way of life. The erosion of ecocultural landscapes, composed of elements related to both the natural and cultural environment, affects the survival of the intangible heritage of these ethnolinguistic communities who, like indigenous peoples worldwide, are highly exposed to environmental change (Ford et al., 2020). Nevertheless, while the

[2] The case of the denigrative comments of the Head of the Criminal Police Directorate in Belgrade towards the Vlachs in the media in spring 2024, with reference to the disappearance of little Danka.

conceptualization of indigenous peoples' rights is based on a material understanding of culture that sees a close relationship between indigenous culture and territory, including specific forms of natural resource use (Laschewski, Häfner, 2013), minority rights in the EU are instead based on a more abstract understanding of culture. The latter tends to marginalize the importance of the natural environment, probably due to the notion that minorities in Europe are different from indigenous groups in the rest of the world. Thus, "attachment to a settlement area is historically determined, but the relationship between natural conditions and culture is relatively loose" (Laschewski, 2013: 25).

For vulnerable minorities living in close contact with the natural environment, there are communicative links that bind people to their environment and to other social units, which has been defined as "sentient ecology" (Anderson, 2002: 116). It follows that strategies for the safeguarding of ecocultural heritage should "combine traditional biodiversity conservation – such as species preservation and ecological management – with the protection of cultural heritages, including traditional knowledge, customs and historical artefacts" (Zhao et al., 2024: 2). Therefore, in order to contribute to the "de-marginalization" (Merkle, 2022) of cultural heritage from a minority perspective, it is essential to shed light on the relationality and interconnectedness of environmental (Ingold, 2000) and socio-cultural phenomena that affect its preservation and transmission. In our case, the marginalization of the Sorbian and Vlach minorities due to their linguistic differences, their proximity to the border, and their rural culture is significantly linked to the concept of "wastelanding". This was used by Traci Brynne Voyles (2015) to define the process by which the land inhabited by indigenous minorities is presented as worthless and without any value. Following this view, the wasteland is "the 'other' through which modern industrialism is established" and it is no coincidence that environmental inequalities are disproportionately borne by racially and economically marginalized communities (Brynne Voyles, 2015: 6). Mining is a form of "slow violence" (Nixon, 2013), and the landscapes in which it takes place embody a "realm of oblivion" (Brynne Voyles, 2015: 10) made up of "foreign tangible and intangible objects about which we do not care, which do not matter to us, and which we do not want to pass on to our heirs" (Kocój, 2015: 138). To wasteland, thus also means to erase the "worldviews, epistemology, history, and cultural and religious practices" of minorities (Brynne Voyles, 2015: 11). These are made "pollutable, marginal, unimportant" by discourses based on cultural hegemony and construct these lands as "peripheral, distant, marginal" (ibid.: 20). In particular, rural areas in border regions are seen as "barren places predisposed to 'deterritorialization'" (Brynne Voyles, 2015: 20), defined as "the loss of commitment by nation-states […] to particular lands or regions" (Valerie Kuletz cited in Brynne Voyles, 2015: 231), including their inhabitants and respective cultures.

The erosion of traditional Sorbian ecosystems

In Lusatia, the most important energy supply region of the former GDR, the expansion of brown coal in the last century has led to the physical destruction of 137 villages. Communication routes, houses, monuments, forests, gardens, churches, cemeteries: every aspect of material life has been affected. As already mentioned, some 29,000 people were forced to leave their homes. Elements of Sorbian heritage such as the language and traditional ways of life disappeared inexorably from people's everyday lives as the villages were dredged up. When the village of Horno was relocated to the town of Forst as part of the opencast mining activities in Jänschwalde from 2003, the state government attempted to ensure a kind of protection for minorities, in contrast to the GDR practice of breaking up communities. However, this new "socially acceptable" (Hagemann, 2022: 19) practice continued to interpret the social component of communities as independent of specific feelings and practices of attachment to place. In addition, the Sorbs were portrayed as existing in "the sphere of culture, free of an environmental-material dimension" (Lippert, 2020: 5). The obligation of today's opencast mine operators (LEAG) to compensate for negative consequences for the Sorbian minority in the event of resettlement within their ancestral territories also ignores the massive interventions that have already taken place in the minority culture (Laschewski et al., 2021: 9). Even "socially acceptable" resettlements always mean a loss of home and cultural security for those affected (Jacobs, 2021), which leaves wounds of varying depth in each individual. In the village of Kausch, for example, it was found that the resettled residents only kept Sorbian customs such as Zampern (groups that go from house to house with masks and costumes and play music), Easter egg painting and the maypole (a decorated tall tree trunk used to celebrate the beginning of spring) until the time of resettlement, but no longer after that (Hagemann, 2023: 151).

Today, the area in which the Sorbian minority lives is largely characterized by mining and coal-fired power plants and is threatened by soil erosion, pollution of surface waters and groundwater as well as air pollution by microparticles and heavy metals (EU Parliament, 2018: 2). In the parish settlement of Schleife, which only hosts a maximum of 30 speakers of the specific *Schleifer/Slěpjański* dialect variant (data obtained by interviews), the destruction of the heath forest (over 97 hectares), including the Weißwasser primeval forest completed in 2015 for the expansion of the Nochten opencast mine, has dealt a severe blow to the survival of traditional ecological knowledge. This concerned, for example, the medicinal use of plants, fruits (rare old pear trees, centuries-old oaks), berries and mushrooms (data obtained by interviews). The vanishing of noteworthy plant species (many of which are threatened with extinction), implied the fact that the use of their names in the Sorbian language also disappeared (data obtained by interviews). The destroyed forests close to the villages were also the places where specific Sorbian rituals were performed, such as collecting water from a spring on Easter Sunday, called "Easter Water" (data obtained by interviews).

In addition, this also meant the destruction of traditional forms of land use such as forestry and agriculture (Jacobs, 2021: 212). The experience of dismantling originally Sorbian villages and cultural landscapes for lignite mining has left deep traces in Sorbian culture, including among writers such as Jurij Koch (1992, 2020). Indeed, "cutting down the forests destroys the home of fairy tales; without forests, what is there to burn? Coal can be burned, opencast mining destroys the fields. Without fields of flowers, the lovers produced no songs" (Lippert, 2020: 3).

The growing toxicity of Vlach environments

In eastern Serbia, mining, which began in Bor in 1903, had a strong impact on the socio-cultural life of the local residents who started being employed in the mines, as well as on the environment. As early as 1935, the inhabitants of the villages of Krivelj, Slatina, and Bor demanded financial compensation from the mining company for the annual harvests destroyed by the smoke and the environmental pollution, which led to the so-called Vlach Revolt (Vlaška Buna), which brought the company's operations to a standstill for almost a month (Stojmenović, 2024: 35). The further development of mining activities in the Vlach villages took place during the Yugoslav period, after the Bor copper mine was nationalized in 1950. Neither Yugoslavia nor Serbia ever took systematic measures to solve the problem of the expansion of mining into populated areas and the need to expropriate agricultural land and farms. Some of the inhabitants of Krivelj had to be relocated to the newly created "Swedish settlement" of Banjice from the early 1980s after the expansion of the mine (Stojmenović, 2024: 22), a process which took over 20 years.

Copper production has quadrupled since Zijin acquired a majority stake in the previously state-owned Serbian mines (RTB, Rudarsko-Topioničarski Basen Bor, "Mining and Smelting Combine Bor") in 2018, making it one of the largest in Europe. The scenes that take place here are "reminiscent of western films about the Wild West of the 18th and 19th centuries" (Vlaška narodna stranka, 2024) and are a clear expression of the wastelanding will of the state authorities. The local population is under pressure from the Chinese company, which is trying to persuade them to sell their land and is left without answers from the local and state authorities. This is not surprising: minority landscapes affected by mining and pollution are often referred to as marginal lands that are "excluded or ignored from the regulatory protection of the state" (Brynne Voyles, 2015: 9). Due to the level of pollution and the threat of destruction, villagers find themselves in a situation where they can no longer physically live on their land to cultivate it for agricultural purposes (data obtained by interviews). Many have voluntarily left the areas and settled in villages and towns that are also very far away from their places of origin (data obtained by interviews). The heritage of the Vlachs, including their language, is increasingly under threat (data obtained by interviews). The remaining inhabitants are trying to prevent the dispersion of their communities

by individual families moving away (data obtained by interviews). They are fighting for the inhabitants of the villages to stay together and be resettled compactly to a new location. Among the many elements of the familiar landscape to be sacrificed was the much-loved Kriveljski Kamen hill, home to rare endemic plant species (data obtained by interviews) and where an ancient necropolis was located (Kapuran et al., 2013). The land grabbing of agricultural and forest land by Zijin seriously threatens the remaining elements of traditional livelihoods in the region. Beekeeping, for example, is no longer sustainable in some parts of the region. The villagers of Krivelj and Oštrelj interviewed for this research unanimously stated that there is no future for the Vlach culture or the Vlach language as their environment is disappearing.

Conclusions

When analyzing the decline of the Sorbian and Vlach language and culture in the areas affected by mining, it should be noted that the intensification of environmental degradation both in Lusatia and in the Timok Valley and the associated displacements and resettlements did not directly lead to the loss of linguistic and cultural elements, but rather intensified and accelerated these processes. It is therefore no coincidence that, for example, the decline in living Sorbian culture and the use of the Sorbian language is more pronounced in those parts of the traditional Sorbian settlement area where opencast lignite mining has changed the landscape than in those parts that have been spared such interventions (Laschewski et al., 2021: 9).

The impact of mining on the lives of the Sorbian and Vlach minorities has existed since 1924 and 1903 respectively. While 137 villages were destroyed on a large scale in Lusatia, with Mühlrose being the last village affected, the impact on the Vlach villages in the Serbian region of Bor was relatively limited in the past, but this has been changing rapidly since the mining company was taken over by the multinational Zijin. Both the experiences of the Vlachs and the Sorbs show that "environmental privilege arises from the discursive process of rendering a space marginal, worthless, unimportantly inhabited and thus pollutable" (Brynne Voyles, 2015: 9). Minority landscapes become "sacrifice zones" (Bullard, 1990), marked by scars which allow industrial modernity to continue to grow and contribute to the erasure of paradigms of ecocultural diversity (Franco, 2022).

It is no coincidence that many extractive activities take place in areas inhabited by indigenous groups and located on the "margins" (border areas, etc.). The specific and strong cultural connection that many minority groups have with their land makes its physical destruction potentially more damaging to the preservation of their heritage than is often the case for other groups. For minorities in Europe, as elsewhere, cultural heritage is an essential tool for preserving and strengthening their identity (Xanthaki, 2019: 270).

However, the environmental and material components and context of heritage are often not considered in official policies and there is a serious gap in minority protection. According to Xanthaki (2019), "the intangible cultural heritage of minorities, although very recently recognized at the international level, is at the EU level better protected than other kinds of cultural heritage. In contrast, the tangible cultural heritage of minorities is left in the total control of the particular member state" (ibid.: 271). Indeed the EU's legal framework is lacking with regards to the safeguarding of the rights of minorities to their cultural heritage, and the European Convention on Human Rights has not yet included the direct protection of minorities' tangible heritage in its scope (ibid.: 278).

Such premises are problematic because viewing culture as something purely abstract, not rooted in context or environment (Chakrabarty, 2009), implies the possibility of neglecting the material and environmental factor in the preservation of minority heritage. This is another potential level of marginalization that needs to be prevented by a more relational conception of heritage that includes a non-dualistic interpretation of nature and culture reflecting a truly ecological view (see Topole, Pipan, 2023). As affirmed in relation to Lusatia, recognizing the importance of Sorbian culture in the region means that the link between culture and nature is established (Jacobs, 2021: 222). The same applies to the Vlachs in eastern Serbia. The fates of the Sorbs and the Vlachs are paradigmatic in this sense, but there are also other minorities on other "margins" of Europe, such as the Sámi (and many others), from whose stories we can gain important insights into the indissolubility of nature and culture in relation to heritage.

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»Pustošenje« dediščine na obrobjih: premisleki na primeru Lužiških Srbov in timoških Vlahov

V članku obravnavam vpliv rudarskih dejavnosti na ekokulturno dediščino lužiškosrbske in vlaške manjšine v dveh vzhodnoevropskih obmejnih regijah v različnih obdobjih prejšnjega stoletja. Pri analizi uničevanja naravnega in kulturnega okolja obeh manjšin se sklicujem na koncept »pustošenja« (ang. *wastelanding*), ki ga je razvila Brynne Voyles (2015) in po katerem se uničevanje okolja dogaja predvsem v okoliščinah, ko domorodno znanje o pokrajinah in njihovi vrednosti postane »onesnaževalno, marginalno, nepomembno«. Proces marginalizacije lužiškosrbskih in vlaških skupnosti se je začel že pred rudarjenjem, in sicer z diskriminacijo in predsodki do njihovega jezika, pa tudi do njihove podeželske kulture in bližine meje. Izzivi družbeno-kulturnih sprememb izvirajo iz izginjanja ekokulturno raznovrstnih (po)krajin, ki veljajo za osrednji element, ki vzdržuje zapletena razmerja v kolektivnih izkušnjah teh manjšinskih skupnosti. Rudarske dejavnosti vplivajo tako na ohranjanje ekološkega znanja kot na kulturne in jezikovne posebnosti ranljivih manjšin, pri čemer je poudarjena vez med kulturno dediščino in obdajajočim materialnim kontekstom.

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Teatro Povero di Monticchiello: Community-based Social Innovation and Intangible Heritage in Rural Tuscany

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The author develops a conceptual framework for studying community-based social innovation and intangible heritage, emphasizing the drivers of place, participation, social values, collective memories, and collaborative leadership. This paper examines the practice of autodrama, staged annually for over fifty years by the Teatro Povero di Monticchiello in rural Tuscany. From the perspective of the local population and surrounding area, autodrama is regarded as heritage, yet its social outcomes also exhibit characteristics of social innovation.

▪ **Keywords**: social innovation, heritage, rural area, community, creativity

Avtor razvije konceptualni okvir za preučevanje na skupnosti temelječih socialnih inovacij in nesnovne dediščine s poudarkom na dejavnikih kraja, participacije, vrednot, kolektivnih spominov in vodenja. V prispevku je obravnavana praksa avtodrame, ki jo že več kot petdeset let vsakoletno prireja gledališče Teatro Povero di Monticchiello na toskanskem podeželju. Z vidika lokalnega prebivalstva in okolice velja avtodrama za dediščino, vendar ima zaradi svojih družbenih učinkov tudi značilnosti socialne inovacije.

▪ **Ključne besede**: socialna inovacija, dediščina, podeželje, skupnost, ustvarjalnost

Introduction

By integrating the concepts of intangible heritage and social innovation, new insights can be gained. Interestingly, social innovation has rarely been linked to heritage, despite the fact that creative development of community-based approaches is common in both intangible heritage and social innovation contexts. The lack of literature at this intersection can be traced back to the temporal dimension. Although heritage tends to refer to the past, while innovation seems to strive to "break free from tradition",[1] both are influenced by what has gone before and both are constantly in the process of reimagining the future. In support of this view, Lowenthal refers to two great German thinkers:

> "Since all depend on what previous generations have transmitted, creative activity is never purely innovative but rather modifies the heritage", observed Wilhelm von Humboldt two centuries ago. "There is all this talk about originality, but what does it amount to?" asked Goethe. (Lowenthal, 2015: 147)

[1] Innovation has been often understood in Schumpeter's (1911) sense as "creative destruction" (e.g. rail transport replacing horse-drawn carriages), with the past and tradition often seen as a constraining factor for innovation. Innovation has traditionally tended to be associated with future-oriented concepts such as social entrepreneurship, progress, growth, etc.

The aim of this paper is to develop a framework for the study of community-based social innovation and intangible heritage, using the theory of social creativity and social innovation through the arts in rural areas, as proposed by André et al. (2013), and to apply the framework to a case study of an autodrama organised by the Teatro Povero di Monticchiello (Poor Theatre of Monticchiello). Monticchiello has just over a hundred inhabitants and is located in the picturesque Tuscan Val d'Orcia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2004. From 1967 to the present day, every year the local community has staged conceptual plays under the name of autodrama, with an emphasis on personal and social narratives about their own experiences, past, problems, values, aspirations and views of the future in the context of everyday life in the village.

What makes Poor Theatre's autodrama a social innovation can be understood in several ways. The first aspect is mainly related to the word 'innovation'; it is about difference and novelty in the context of the Tuscan countryside, i.e. its "uniqueness", as one of the promoters of the practice pointed out. Indeed, one of the main characteristics of social innovation is "new ways of achieving goals" (Zapf, 1989: 179). In this context, the notion of creativity is very important. The second aspect is more nuanced and focuses on the meaning of 'social', which can refer to "the basic idea of social innovation as a motor of change rooted in social collaboration and social learning, the response to unmet social needs as a desirable outcome, and society as the arena in which change should take place" (Bock, 2016: 554–555). As Vrtovec Beno points out, "contemporary folk theatre is certainly a response to the current situation and needs of society, adapting to the current situation and wishes of the local community" (Vrtovec Beno, 2023: 118). The third aspect relates to the notion of 'place', as some argue that the civil society response to a particular need, desire, aspiration or search for a solution is necessarily locally constructed (e.g. Tiran et al., 2022).

The Poor Theatre's autodrama can be understood in a similar way as intangible cultural heritage is defined by the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage:

> […] intangible cultural heritage [e.g. Poor Theatre's autodrama], transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity. (UNESCO, 2003: 4)

In this paper I refer to heritage as a creative engagement with the past for the needs of the present and the future (Harrison, 2012). Heritage is "an active process of assembling a series of objects, places, and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future", because "thinking of heritage as a creative engagement with the past in the present focuses our attention on our ability to take an active and informed role in the

production of our own 'tomorrow'" (Harrison, 2012: 4). Understanding heritage in terms of creativity and the future makes it clear why it can be linked to social innovation. In the field of critical heritage studies, the term "heritage making" (e.g. Smith, 2011) is often used, strongly suggesting that it concerns an active social and creative process. Heritage making can also be socially innovative in the sense that it can respond to social needs, it can create social value and/or it can be the result of social cooperation and social learning (e.g. Bock, 2016). Smith argues that the process of heritage making "can have both conservative and socially progressive outcomes" (2011: 23).

Community-based social innovation and intangible heritage in rural areas: A conceptual framework

Communities in rural areas have rarely been associated with social innovation, but in recent years there has been an increase in this stream of research (e.g. Bock, 2016; Castro-Arce, Vanclay, 2020; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2023; Vercher et al., 2023). Social innovations are context-specific and explicitly perceived as innovative in their local context (innovations new to the community) (e.g. Vercher et al., 2023). The importance of communities in the study of social innovation is recognised by many authors, who usually link social innovation to participation and bottom-up approaches (e.g. Castro-Arce, Vanclay, 2020; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2023). Waterton and Smith argue that among community-related concepts, such as community heritage, "it is the phrases 'community collaboration' and 'community-based' that are the more promising, both in terms of describing the range of aims for community engagement and in allowing the most room for the development of effective engagements" (Smith, Waterton, 2009: 16). Community-based approaches to heritage are increasingly recognised, including in rural areas (e.g. Šmid Hribar, Ledinek Lozej, 2013; Fakin Bajec, 2016; Beel et al., 2017). When studies refer to communities in rural areas, they are mainly local communities based on close relationships and face-to-face communication. This perspective is also relevant to my case study. I understand communities, following Waterton and Smith, as "social creations and experiences that are continuously in motion, rather than fixed entities and descriptions, in flux and constant motion, unstable and uncertain" (Waterton, Smith, 2010: 8–9), and as "an ongoing process in which identity is explored and (re)created" (ibid.: 12). It is important to stress that the focus of both social innovation (e.g. Christmann et al., 2020; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2023) and heritage making (e.g. Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2012) is on a social and collaborative process rather than a product. In addition, as mentioned in the introduction, the temporal dimension is another important common feature, as both approaches aim to meet present and future needs.

In developing a conceptual framework for the study of community-based social innovation and intangible heritage, I draw on the existing one developed by André et al. (2013), who identified the fundamental aspects for the emergence of social creativity

and social innovation through the arts in urban and rural areas. André et al. (2013: 247) identified the following issues to be key in the development of social innovation in rural areas: i) participation (neighbourhood networks and relationships, cooperation based on personal trust), ii) collective references and memories (intangible heritage – stories, poetry, music, etc.), iii) leadership (importance of personal charisma and of personal ties), iv) geographical scale (place – daily spaces of the local community) (ibid.: 247). The aim of this paper is to complement their framework with a heritage perspective, and to apply the new conceptual framework to a concrete case study of the Poor Theatre's autodrama. I refer in particular to this framework because of its emphasis on the link between social innovation and social creativity, the latter of which, as we have seen, is very closely linked to processes in the domain of intangible heritage. When I examined my ethnographic data, the same aspects as in André et al. (2013) emerged as key to the development of social innovation, except that I recognised the dimension related to social values as very significant. Therefore, I added this category to cover the missing aspects. In my view, linking intangible heritage and social innovation can contribute to a theoretical understanding of both mainly through a research focus on the place, participation, social values, collective memories, and collaborative leadership (Table 1). In what follows, I do not discuss each of these drivers in detail, but only outline the basic aspects that may be particularly relevant to the analysis of different case studies.

Place has often been discussed in the field of heritage, because "heritage is about a sense of place. Not simply in constructing a sense of abstract identity, but also in helping us position ourselves as a nation, community, or individual and our 'place' in our cultural, social, and physical world" (Smith, 2006: 75). Place "is not necessarily subsumed by the national or global, rather the national or regional are made up of innumerable places" (ibid.: 76). In the field of social innovation, an increasing number of authors argue for the place specificity of innovation (e.g. MacCallum et al., 2009; Brandsen et al., 2016; Tiran et al., 2022; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2023).

Encouraging participatory processes is important, as Smith argues that social networks and relations generate "a sense of belonging and identity" (2011: 24). Hafstein and Skydstrup (2020) write that community participation is playing an increasingly important role in heritage making, not least through the UNESCO conventions. In recent decades, there has been an increasing international focus on the issue of participation also in social innovation research (e.g. Brandsen et al, 2016; Neumeier, 2017). Social innovations are often understood as being "created mainly by networks and joint action" (Brandsen et al., 2016: 6).

While a values-based approach to management has become established in the heritage field (e.g. Clark, Maeer, 2008; De la Torre, 2013), in the field of social innovation, 'social' is often understood primarily in terms of creating social value, i.e. benefits for the public or community as a whole (Phills et al., 2008). It is important to distinguish social value from private value (e.g. Van der Have, Rubalcaba, 2016).

In heritage studies, social values can be understood "as a collective attachment to place that embodies meanings and values that are important to a community or communities" (Jones, 2017: 22). Values are therefore "inextricably tied to emotions" (Horlings, 2015: 262) and places (e.g. Altman, Low, 2012).

Collective memories have been largely overlooked in the field of social innovation,[2] while they play a prominent role in the field of heritage (e.g. Halbwachs, 1991; Macdonald, 2012; Hrobat Virloget, 2021). Heritage incorporates "a range of activities that include remembering, commemoration, communicating and passing on knowledge and memories" (Smith, 2011: 23). In this context, heritage can be understood "as a cultural tool in the performances of commemoration, remembering and forgetting" (Smith, 2011: 22). Collective memories can be distinguished in some respects from the concept of heritage. The former is a less institutionalised and strategic process – whereas the latter is an action-oriented and strategic process – of selecting from past events, objects, and practices (Rogelja Caf et al., 2020).

The notion of (collaborative) leadership (e.g. Ansell, Gash, 2012; Sørensen, Torfing, 2013) has played an important role in the social innovation literature, mainly because of its close links to entrepreneurship and governance. However, in the field of cultural heritage, the leadership concept is more limited, with the emphasis being on the management aspect. It is worth adding here that leadership is not necessarily linked to an authorised heritage discourse (AHD) (cf. Smith, 2006). While AHD is associated with standardised, formalised and official top-down approaches, collaborative leadership emphasises the importance of shared responsibility and collective decision-making (e.g. Shier, Handy, 2020). Leaders may not have formal titles or positions, but are recognised by other community members for their knowledge, expertise, or influence.

Table 1. Conceptual framework for community-based social innovation and intangible heritage in rural areas.

Common features	**Key drivers**	**Key aspects**
TEMPORAL DIMENSION	PLACE	daily spaces of local community; sense of place; local-global context (e.g. touristification)
COMMUNITY-BASED DIMENSION	PARTICIPATION	community engagement and joint action; social networks and relations (e.g. intergenerational relations); a sense of belonging and identity
SOCIAL PROCESS DIMENSION	SOCIAL VALUES	preserving and creating social values; place attachment: emotional connection
	COLLECTIVE MEMORIES	commemoration, remembering and forgetting; passing on knowledge of the past (for the needs of the present and the future)
	COLLABORATIVE LEADERSHIP	importance of personal charisma; personal ties based on trust; facilitative role

[2] One of the exceptions is the study of "industrial culture" in the city of Velenje in Slovenia (Kozina et al., 2021; Tiran et al., 2022). Through collective memories and remembering, the collective values of industrialism and socialism are preserved. These are "embedded in the shared consciousness of citizens, companies and institutions, and are translated into numerous social innovations and services" (Kozina et al., 2021: 9).

Methodology and the context of Poor Theatre in Monticchiello

My fieldwork in March-April 2022 and August 2023 in the areas of Val di Chiana and Val d'Orcia in south-eastern Tuscany was an opportunity to explore social life in Monticchiello and to follow the contemporary development of the Poor Theatre with a focus on autodrama. It is performed by local people as (amateur) theatre actors in the summer for a span of two (in the past three) weeks. During this time, there are daily plays and many people visit the village, mainly from other places in Italy. Andrews (2004: 49) argues that Monticchiello can be considered a success compared to other Tuscan villages facing similar problems of emigration, as there is more prosperity in the village than its inhabitants could have imagined half a century ago. Empowerment has been achieved by the villagers through the activities of the Poor Theatre, both on an individual and collective level (Andrews, 2004: 54). Monticchiello is located in the neighbouring Tuscan region of Val d'Orcia, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It belongs to the municipality of Pienza and is about 5 kilometres from the medieval town of Pienza, also a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The focus of my study is on contemporary analysis from a variety of perspectives, with less attention paid to the historical aspect of the development of the Poor Theatre, as this has been extensively researched. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the documentation produced by the local community of Monticchiello (Rosa et al., 2005; Profili, 2010) and the academic contributions (Andrews, 2004; Berti, 2017; Ruffini, 2018).[3] Briefly on the historical context: until the early 1960s, the agricultural economy of much of the Tuscan countryside was based on sharecropping, a system in which peasants lived in harsh conditions and rented land for half of their own harvest. In the past, these areas were highly marginalised, largely because of poor transport links, and in the 1960s they fell into even greater economic crisis as a result of the so-called "economic boom" in Italy's major industrial cities, to which many rural inhabitants migrated (Gaggio, 2017). The Poor Theatre began in 1967 and eventually evolved into the Cooperative of the Poor Theatre of Monticchiello (Cooperativa di Comunità del Teatro Povero di Monticchiello) in 1980, which today also owns a restaurant and the only museum in the village. Since the beginning of the autodrama, an additional source of income has been the restaurant, which is now located in the crypt of the church and in a former granary (Andrews, 2004: 48). Like in many contemporary folk theatres (e.g. Vrtovec Beno, 2023), the economic aspect is not based on performances, but in the additional offer that the organisers prepare for the visitors.

[3] The autodrama of the Poor Theatre has also recently attracted the attention of filmmakers, and in 2017 the American directors Jeff Malmberg and Chris Shellen made the film *Spettacolo*, which presents the community theatre work of the villagers of Monticchiello.

Figure 1. Il Bronzino, the restaurant of the Poor Theatre, before the autodrama performance. Photo: Marko Senčar Mrdaković, 2023.

Figure 2. The office, museum, shop and restaurant Il Bronzino of the Poor Theatre are located in the former granary. Photo: Marko Senčar Mrdaković, 2023.

Figure 3. Bringing the rural past to life in the TePoTraTos museum in the former granary. Photo: Marko Senčar Mrdaković, 2022.

In 2004, the representatives of the theatre, in collaboration with the Sienese museums, established the TePoTraTos museum – Scenes from the Traditional Tuscan People's Theatre (Scene dal Teatro Popolare Tradizionale Toscano). Today, the museum plays a significant role in the presentation of the theatre and rural culture of the past.

The Poor Theatre is therefore constantly evolving and is pursuing certain socio-economic sustainability goals by creating additional jobs. A concrete example is the creation of an e-bike recharging information and service point, Le Ciclofficine del Teatro Povero, in Bagno Vignoni, a few kilometres from Monticchiello. It is regarded as "a new model of social innovation where citizens are both producers and users of goods and services" (Le Ciclofficine del Teatro Povero, 2024). In this paper I am not focusing on these broader aspects, i.e. the various activities of the Poor Theatre, although they are very important for the development of the community, as I am concentrating exclusively on the current practice of autodrama, which is a key anchor of identity and a binding thread of the local community.

The research is based on semi-structured interviews and informal conversations, as well as participant observation in the village of Monticchiello. I spoke to the people who have a leading role in the Poor Theatre, as well as to the directors of the autodrama. It was important to have conversations with people who have recently joined the Poor Theatre, as well as with those who have been in the theatre for decades. So, I had conversations with both older people and younger people. Visiting the autodrama in 2023 and the village at different times is an important aspect of understanding the local context.

I was able to use the participant observation method when I visited the autodrama, I was involved in setting up the venue and I spoke to the people who were responsible for setting up the stage and other equipment. The aim of this paper is to find out how individuals involved in the conduct of autodrama experience this innovation-heritage practice. I am interested in what aspects of practice unfold without tension or conflict, and when and why major challenges arise.

Poor Theatre's autodrama as social innovation and intangible heritage

Place

André et al. (2013: 246) highlight the importance of an adequate daily space where the local community can meet. In this case study, this is the square (*la piazza*), where villagers meet and carry out activities, and where economic and social relations are formed. Smith (2006) believes that thinking deeply about a place reveals a lot about the heritage process itself. Gathering in the square has been of great importance in the village throughout history, even before the start of the theatre, as described by Giovanni:[4]

> *On 25 July there was a cattle market* [La Fiera del Bestiame]. *They sold cows, bulls, calves and sheep. It was a time when the whole community came together to have a big celebration, a big moment of being together. When the village stopped being peasant, agricultural, sharecropping, the Poor Theatre began. The first year of the Poor Theatre is the last year of the cattle fair. It is a ritual linked to the calendar, linked to the time of year when everyone is together. They rediscovered the joy of being together of being together in the open air and telling stories. It is a very old thing, but at the same time it has found a modern form.*

Through the square, people identify themselves, construct their own identity and reflect on the world, while at the same time the square "provides an anchor of shared experiences between people and a physical demonstration of continuity over time" (Smith, 2006: 76). In the case of Monticchiello's historical experience we can observe that the square is "recognised as the most important public space, a source and symbol of civic power" (Low, 2000: 35). The "power of the place" (e.g. Smith, 2006: 74), i.e. of the square, is invoked. As the community itself has written, the Poor Theatre was

[4] For reasons of personal data protection, all informants are anonymised in the article. All interviews and conversations were conducted in Italian, and translated into English by myself using the DEEPL translation tool.

"born" in the piazza,[5] "every year the piazza is transformed into an extraordinary stage, an ideal venue for the staging of an autodrama. In addition to its theatrical function, the square has always been a centre of civic gathering, of confessions, of decisions, of self-analysis" (Profili, 2005: 23). "Doing theatre is called 'going to the piazza' [*andare in piazza*], and in theatre 'on the piazza are put' [*mettono in piazza*] the problems, ideas and points of view of Monticchiello and its people" (Profili, 2010: 35). In 1981, the villagers also dedicated a series of performances to the square, entitled *La Piazza*. In this show, *piazza* is always written with a capital letter, "because the piazza is, above all, a place-symbol of the community, the centre of collective life that has regained life and dignity thanks to the theatre" (Profili, 2010: 35). It should be noted that the square has become an inspiration for creativity and innovation.

It is also necessary to look at a wider spatial scale. Monticchiello is part of the municipality of Pienza and is only about 5 kilometres from the town of Pienza. The whole region has gained heritage recognition over the last few decades, with Pienza being inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1996 and the Val d'Orcia as a cultural landscape in 2004. Today, the region's tourism status brings new opportunities for economic growth, but also threats (e.g. gentrification, touristification, centre–periphery tensions) (e.g. Moreschini et al., 2016; Giovannoni, 2017). However, compared to Pienza and some other towns in the region, Monticchiello is considered to be less under pressure from tourism: *"In some places yes, there's too much tourism.* […] *It's clear that when you enter the UNESCO circuit, people come. In Monticchiello it is quiet"* (Bruno). It was important for me to understand these wider heritage processes and the rise of tourism in relation to the practice of the Poor Theatre, hence my conversation partner:

> *UNESCO is like a medal, it's a bit of recognition of the beauty and importance of a place. And then the fact that this place should in any case be protected in its identity by not selling out to tourism, that is a community thing. It is we who tend to want to remain as we are and not sell out to the tourist market. We in Monticchiello are like that. If we like ourselves, the tourists will be happy.* […] *But we do not change our menus, then our plays, according to what the tourist market demands. Otherwise we would be doing plays in English, for example. We live our lives and open ourselves up to everyone, and so far, we have been lucky because people appreciate that authenticity.* (Giulio)

[5] The autodrama plays were originally held in Piazza San Martino, but since 2005 in nearby Piazza della Commenda.

Figure 4. Piazza della Comenda at a time when there are no autodrama performances. Photo: Marko Senčar Mrdaković, 2022.

Figure 5. Piazza della Comenda during the preparations for the autodrama performances. Photo: Marko Senčar Mrdaković, 2023.

As can be seen from the above statements, tourism has not boomed in terms of numbers, nor has it had a major impact on the mentality of the local community itself. Strong community cohesion and a sense of place, including language and traditions (e.g. food), have prevented the negative impacts of tourism. Interestingly, as described by Gaggio (2017: 251–269), Monticchiello was at the turn of the century at the centre of disputes over the shaping of the cultural landscape of the Val d'Orcia. In the 1980s, the idea of expanding the residential area of a town became more and more vocal and the conflict continued until the first decade of the 21st century. Of course, the Poor Theatre also played an important role in this period, with plays addressing the problems of depopulation and the deterioration of the cultural landscape. This conflict is one of the examples of how the autodrama approach has been used to address key issues in the local community and the wider region.

Participation

André et al. (2013) highlight the importance of participation in rural areas, particularly in terms of the development of neighbourhood networks and relationships and cooperation based on personal trust. *"If you want to share with the community, Monticchiello is the place to be"* (Veronica), remarked one of my conversation partners. Poor Theatre, like folk theatre in general (e.g. Vrtovec Beno, 2023), is about the participation of the whole local community, i.e. inhabitants of Monticchiello and the surrounding areas. They take part in the preparation of the plays in many ways, such as making props and costumes, contributing to the text by telling stories, etc. Giulio was delighted with the performance of the 2023 autodrama, where several generations were visibly involved:

> *I am so excited this year because the kids who play the characters are all grandchildren* […], *grandchildren play grandparents* […]. *So, it's like you're doing a play and you're acting as your grandfather. This is nice because* […] *you bring a piece of your family on stage. It's a beautiful thing.*

Giulio added that this year about fifty people took part in the autodrama, which is a significant number for them. Both younger and older generations are involved, with young people being brought up in the theatre from childhood. Giulio has observed: *"Children who do theatre are different. My child was very shy, and when he started doing theatre he became more confident."* The importance of a continuing link between the generations should be emphasised, whereby tacit knowledge and experience is passed on from one generation to the next. It is about fostering social learning and collaboration, which are often seen as essential in social innovation processes (Bock, 2016).

Figure 6. Panoramic view from the village of Monticchiello. Photo: Marko Senčar Mrdaković, 2022.

Figure 7. The people of Monticchiello, young and old, applaud the audience at the end of the performance. Photo: Marko Senčar Mrdaković, 2023.

Giulio described the process of assembling an autodrama:

> *Imagine that there are a lot of people at the beginning, then five to six people come together to make a summary. Then they take the thing back to the assembly, and it's reworked again and again until there's a plot, a text and a script. So, at the final point, rehearsals start. It's a long building phase*. (Giulio)

The process of creating plays is long and takes almost the whole year, at least from January to August. The work is therefore very demanding for the community and challenges them not to fall apart before the play is performed. Problems can arise in practice for simple reasons that are not obvious to outside observers:

> *I mean, we arrange everything as if we're sure it's there. But we're not sure until it's staged. Because there are so many variables, so many people.* […] *It's not like it's a company of paid actors, that there's a contract* […], *maybe one of them says enough is enough, I'm not coming anymore.* (Giulio)

Participation in social innovation processes and in the case of intangible heritage is often of an informal and voluntary nature, and therefore requires a specific engagement, which is primarily recognised in the desire to address societal goals and needs (e.g. Fakin Bajec, 2016; Beel et al., 2017; Shier, Handy, 2020). Thus, it is important to note that such collective efforts often face obstacles and problems in practice. The effort required by an individual to participate in the community is clearly illustrated by the following account:

> *I hope that this thing will continue despite all the difficulties.* […] *When I find myself talking about it, I talk about it with great enthusiasm and I think it's really something to take as an example. But then, when I live here, I realise that sometimes it's a bit difficult, because it's like in all families or all places. Relationships are never idyllic, they have to be built, and the beautiful thing is that this experience leads you to be there, to always be there, and so in a way it forces you to deal with it, and then you understand that it's possible to go on. So it is not an idyll here, despite the fact that it has this very ennobling project. It brings you a lot. You can overcome certain difficulties. There are moments when you notice the limiting negative aspects that all small communities have. On the other hand, this is a project that has been going on for so many years and that also pushes you personally to overcome many things, and to move forward.* (Veronica)

As Waterton and Smith point out, communities are "not always sources of empowerment" (2010: 9). Veronica continues her statement on the aspect of how it is sometimes necessary to adapt in the community:

> *I'm feeling a little bit less emotionally involved in some aspects than last year.* […] *Because there was a scene with the women, it was us and we contributed to making this flag of peace, and it moved me more emotionally than this year's play.* […] *Yes, it belonged to me* […]. *Not because there's no important content in this year's edition.* […] *In fact, in the last play it was probably the scene with all the women that made me participate more emotionally.* (Veronica)

I observed that there is a kind of expectation that people would participate in the activities of the community. For example, an elderly longtime actor said: *"I'd like to see more participation on the constructive level, more participation of the people who go to the square to do it"* (Bruno). Beneath the surface, there are many problems of an objective nature. From the 1960s to the present day, as in other places in the Tuscan countryside, the ageing population and the emigration of young people have been a key problem. Daniela, a middle-aged woman, highlighted:

> *With young people it is more difficult, because they have other interests, maybe they go out to study or go on school holidays with friends. So, there is an objective difficulty. Because when the theatre started there was nothing to do, there was no alternative way of getting together. Now it's more difficult for people between the ages of fifteen and twenty, twenty-five, when you finish university*. (Daniela)

Giulio added: *"They leave, they come back, participate one year, then participate two years* […]*."* Difficulties with the participation were also raised in regard to changes in the employment situation:

> *Youth started to do also tourist activities, so in the summer there is a high concentration of work. Emerging new jobs are less compatible with theatre activities in the summer. Whereas before there were farmers, and when it was dark enough there was theatre. But sociality has also changed, now there's TV, there are mobile phones* […]. (Giulio)

Interestingly, in the winter there are more participants, *"because in winter many here do nothing"* (Giulio). The reason why some (young) people return year after year and continue to participate in the theatre's activities, as do local residents despite their other

work commitments, is usually because of "a sense of belonging and identity" (Smith, 2011: 24). However, it can be recognised that some of the aspects of modernity (e.g. digital devices) pose additional challenges to this sense (on the relationship between tradition and modernity, see Gaggio, 2017).

Social values

In order to identify the reasons and understand why individuals participate in community practices, or what hinders them from doing so, it is important to pay attention to values. At the outset, it should be pointed out that social values are very closely linked to emotions and affects (e.g. Horlings, 2015), and to place (Jones, 2017). Giulio is one of the few people who does not come from the village of Monticchiello – he lives a few kilometres away – and is deeply involved in the work of the Poor Theatre.

> *Imagine, when I was little, I had my grandparents who had a farm, and they too had left the farm. The fields, the animals, the traditions* […]. *And here I grew up with lumberjacks, so I grew up with people who really had a heritage of identity and traditions* [un patrimonio di identità e tradizioni]. *When I went to the city, I completely lost that dimension* […]. (Giulio)

Here the values refer to the distinction between the rural and the urban, to the individual's recognition that the rural area has a "dimension" that he has lost in the city. In a similar sense to Giulio, the director of autodrama refers to his own disappearing rural past as a value that drives him to collaborate:

> *I no longer had so much passion for theatre, how to say bourgeois, commercial. Here I found a type of theatre that had many consonances with what had been my past, my identity, my life. Perhaps also because I had grown up in a place that I had seen dying, that had disappeared.* (Giovanni)

Giulio describe his first experience of the theatre:

> *When I was five, six years old, my grandmother took me to the Poor Theatre in Monticchiello. It was December 1982. She takes me there, I see this play and I kind of fall in love with it, because all those things I was losing, those traditions, the dialect, the dimension of the country, the identity, they not only, let's say, transmitted it, but they put it on a stage, so they gave it importance* […] *and that gave me serenity, security, because someone was still attached.* (Giulio)

As the above statement shows, values are closely intertwined with the rural past and everything that concerns it, such as dialect, identity, memories, or traditions. Performance plays a key role in creating social value in places (e.g. Jones, 2017). The dialect aspect appears to be particularly important as Giulio illustrated: *"When I was a boy, one thing about theatre that I will never forget was a simple thing. The peasants would shout the words of the dialect into a box and then close it. So as not to lose them."* Similar findings were made by Vrtovec Beno, who showed that dialect is the part of the community's heritage that performers want to portray, that they are most proud of, and that helps them express themselves: "Dialect is not only an easier ground for creativity, but also a ticket to the hearts of the audience" (Vrtovec Beno, 2023: 128–129). From the whole of the past, individuals choose what is important to them and decide how to present it, display it, or handle it in the future (e.g. Harrison, 2012). In other words, it is a process of social value creation.

For another conversation partner, who is also closely involved in the work of the Poor Theatre and who comes from Pienza, a few kilometres away, it wasn't her peasant past that tied her to the theatre, but the desire to experience and learn something new and, in the end, to be part of it: *"Let's say, for me it is also an opportunity to rediscover myself in different aspects, either in tasks or in roles in which I would never have wanted to find myself"* (Veronica). She went on to share her belief that the way of working together in the community of Monticchiello *"gives importance to the exchange between people"* and *"preserves values that are actually beginning to crumble around us"* because *"people* [in Monticchiello] *have always lived their values, what is important to them."*

I also spoke to individuals who grew up in Monticchiello and have been part of the theatre throughout their lives. An elderly gentleman, reflecting on the importance of the theatre in his life, pointed out: *"It has meant a lot to me. It is the fact that I did not do some other thing outside Monticchiello, but that they invented something for me to stay here. Forty years ago, the theatre also had a big impact, because it was a very beautiful period of theatre. And so, I liked staying here for that, too.* […] *I quite liked acting"* (Bruno). With Daniela, middle-aged woman who has been acting in plays since the age of four, I discussed if the branding and commercialisation of theatre for tourist purposes can make it lose its meaning. She emphasized that autodrama *"is not just a play, it's like a ritual. There is also an intimate aspect."* She thinks that *"it is difficult to do this for others. You do it for others but also for you."* Giulio added that *"sometimes, to do it for others you should also do it in simpler, even more natural language. For us irony is important. The content is not for the audience, mainly it is for the community."* Indeed, one of the most important aspects of autodrama is that individuals decide what they want to talk about in the plays. It applies to all members of the community, *"they tell about the situations they feel, they have to tell"* (Daniela). Individuals do not see autodrama as a mere "play" or "performance" and often insist that it is something more, for example, a "ritual". Interestingly, Vrtovec Beno, who has

Figure 8. Performers with things they want to take to the Moon. Photo: Marko Senčar Mrdaković, 2023.

studied a variety of folk theatres in Slovenia, has made a different observation that the actors no longer see the performances as having a "ritual function" (Vrtovec Beno, 2023: 138). The people I spoke to saw the ritual as something primarily intended for the community, whereas a mere "play" or "performance" is intended for a wider audience.

In the plays of the 2023 autodrama, named *Colòni*, I was able to observe for myself how values are closely intertwined with self-reflection in the autodrama. In the play, the inhabitants of Monticchiello wondered if tomorrow they would be forced to leave their land, as generations of sharecroppers have been forced to do, and head for the Moon: "What do I want to take with me? What do I really need? What can I not give up? What unnecessary things can I do without, so that I do not have to reduce myself to the essential?" (Teatro Povero, 2023).

At the end of the play, the oldest actor in the theatre, Arturo, gave an emotional speech and said:

> I'll take the land, of course, because there's nothing more beautiful and important for me and for all of us. The land has made us sweat, it's true! But it has also given us food, it has given us work and it will give us more! In this land there are all the stories we have lived […]. Those that have been told […]. In each one of these grains, there's a piece of our theatre […]. Of our fathers, our brothers, our sisters, our grandfathers

> […]. And I take this land with me, of course! Because for me, this land […]. This land is our theatre! (Teatro Povero di Monticchiello, 2023: 50)

It is interesting to note that in the autodramas, the community of Monticchiello is often portrayed as having a difficult past, for example the difficulties of the peasants' everyday life and exploitation in the context of sharecropping, but on the other hand, as can be seen from the above quotation, there is also a kind of "idealization of rural life […] as part of a more general valorisation of the relationship between landscape and identity, religion, and work" (Giovannoni, 2017: 15). In this way, the community gives value and meaning to a rural past that is both "difficult" and "idealised".

Collective memories

In relation to collective references and memories, André et al. highlight the importance of "non-material heritage (stories, poetry, music, ...)" (2013: 247). They argue that collective references and memories "provide the necessary anchors that ensure the resilience of places and their ability to embrace what is new without degenerating into fragmentation and 'negative' conflict" (ibid.: 246). It is important to note that an individual incorporates memories shared with others into his or her subjective perception, in a sense "personalising" them (Brumen, 2000: 25). Giulio highlighted: *"Points of view also depend on generations. For example, the war, it's normal that we see it differently as a boy of 18 or, certainly, a person of 80, 90. He sees it differently."* However, each individual memory is a potential collective memory, "individuals can therefore think and talk about events that happened long before they were born" (Brumen, 2000: 27), such as the Second World War. "Collective memory is the carrier of information about seemingly lost and forgotten things, and it is the means by which we can place our personal memories in the wider context of the community" (ibid.: 27). Connerton (1989) argues that it is through performance of various kinds that collectives, such as communities, remember.

An important milestone in the staging of collective memory is the 1969 performance of the Poor Theatre, when the villagers decided to dramatise their own experiences of the war that took place in their area in 1944. The title was *That 6 April 1944* (*Quel 6 Aprile del '44*), the day when the German Nazis lined up most of the village population along the medieval walls to execute them in retaliation for their support of the partisans, but were dissuaded from doing so by a woman who was the wife of a local landowner and herself German, even from the same town as the Nazi commander. In some situations, the villagers actually played themselves, so the therapeutic value of such performances was obvious (Andrews, 2004: 41–42).

In the preparation of plays, the inhabitants of the village of Monticchiello always relate their collective past to their experience in the present and to their views of the future (e.g. Harrison, 2012). Veronica said: *"That's what I've learned here in Monticchiello,*

that you have to start from the roots in order to move forward into the future." In the early years of the theatre, the community started to dig into the roots of the peasant world, and there was "a gold mine, in the peasant world they discovered so many stories" (Profili, 2010: 49–50). In an increasingly changing society, the tendency to preserve the peasant past has become increasingly important. The "invention of tradition" lies in "the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant" (Hobsbawm, Ranger, 2012 [1983]: 2).

The content of the performances is related on the one hand to what has been and is happening in the everyday life of the local community, and on the other to what is happening in the world (e.g. the COVID pandemic, wars, migration): *"In the seventies we did a play about abortion, or about the problem of the elderly* […]*, but always things attached to our reality. It was a microcosm that then later, naturally, also spoke of contemporary society"* (Bruno). Migration issues were one of the many examples:

> *If there is a problem that is related to refugees, then there is a moment in which you reflect on this situation, and there is a moment in which you remember when we were refugees. Because people from Monticchiello went to France, to Germany, to Australia, to the United States, to look for work, because here they were poor and had nothing.* (Giulio)

Some people come to Poor Theatre's autodrama as visitors every year because they are interested in what people have to say about their past and present ways of life. *"There are people who come back because they know the history* [of rural Tuscany]*"* (Daniela). What makes these events specifically intriguing is the fact that the known history changes in relation to the present views.

> *Let's say the difference is this: the museum is a static thing, isn't it? It is fixed in the memory of a moment. And an experience like this is made up of people, so it moves, it is identity that is not static, it's in motion. Our thinking keeps changing, our experiences keep changing, even our sense of identity keeps changing, because the plays that we, who are forty years old today, can create are different from those created by the first ones, who are ninety years old today.* (Giulio)

The above statement can be linked to theorisations of memory and commemoration in heritage making: "[W]ith each new encounter with place, with each new experience of place, meanings and memories may subtly, or otherwise, be rewritten or remade" (Smith, 2006: 77). This processual understanding of heritage making, in which generations play an important role, can be seen as an invitation and stimulus to innovation.

For Giulio, the Poor Theatre is *"a place where people meet, talk, tell each other things, exchange opinions, argue and also cherish memories. Because memories in life are a beautiful thing. I mean, if you don't have a memory, you're nobody, right?"*

Collaborative leadership

Here, André et al. (2013) stress the importance of personal charisma and personal connections. As all the actors in a theatre are usually locals, leaders have less difficulty in assigning roles and tasks within the community since they know the skills and knowledge of their fellow members (cf. Vrtovec Beno, 2023: 65). There were many important personalities who had a significant influence on the development of the Poor Theatre. Today, the people of Monticchiello are particularly attached to the directing work of Andrea Cresti, who recently died in 2021. He was a local resident who had previously been involved in art, painting, and took over dramaturgical work in 1981. His main characteristic, according to those close to Andrea, was that he forged close personal ties with the autodrama's co-creators, so that their work was based on trust. Elderly villager Bruno, who had worked with Cresti for decades, spoke about him in a highly emotional and positive way:

> *The theatre was really a cultural heritage* [un patrimonio culturale]*, now let's say it has mutated, it has mutated because the director died last year. He had a very strong capacity for theatre. He did it for forty years, you know? And I was very attached to him, so for me it has changed a bit.* […] *Also, from a cultural point of view, this is becoming something else, it seems to me.*

From the above discussion, we can see the importance of personal ties, attachment and trust in the community. A change in leadership, i.e. the director of the plays, necessarily means a change in the way things are done, at least in some ways. In other words, the cultural heritage itself has changed, and part of it may even have disappeared with the absence of that person. It might be added that innovation, i.e. a new way of doing things, has led to a kind of "disrupting" (e.g. Christmann et al., 2020: 499) of the heritage. One important difference in recent years is that there are now two directors in charge of the coordination and preparation of the play. The directors have been working together for six years and both come from Chianciano Terme, a few kilometres from Monticchiello. I spoke to another inhabitant about the preparations for the latest autodrama, who said:

> *It seems to me that we started a bit late with the preparation of all this. Actually, when I think about it now and see the result, on the one hand I say, well… Because when Andrea Cresti was the director, the preparation*

> *was actually much longer.* […] *I always had the feeling that the preparation was much longer. With this new direction it is a bit more streamlined. Let's just say that in some cases there is also a little bit of anxiety about being able to pull it off.* (Veronica)

However, there are also positive aspects of the new way of doing things. *"Let's say that before there was only one director, now there are two directors, so they can edit different scenes, maybe on the same night. One takes care of one scene, one takes care of another"* (Giulio). When I spoke to the two directors about the new way of working, they highlighted the key advantage of working in tandem:

> *It is the nature and the expectations of the actors, who are so many. And the more time passes, the more I realise that it is very fortunate that there are two of us, because the sensitivity of one would not be enough. We would run the risk of displeasing someone, which means that someone would probably be left out. Being two helps. Sometimes Nino might see something that I don't see and vice versa.* (Giovanni)

One of the aspects of the new way of working is that it makes it easier for them to deal with multiple perspectives in the preparation of plays, which is crucial in the context of heritage processes. Smith (2006) used the concept of the authorised heritage discourse to present one of the most problematic issues in these processes, namely that some voices in the community are marginalised. By sharing tasks and providing leadership based on trust, respect and strong commitment, the meanings and aspirations of different individuals can be more successfully integrated. In this context, the second director commented: *"We are happy to do it because it's not a trivial task. It's very difficult in such a multifaceted, collective, plural reality. It is difficult to see everything on one's own"* (Nino). I found their work to be highly ethnographic in nature, producing precise descriptions and nuanced interpretations from multiple perspectives, which they confirmed and also described their experiences:

> *Very ethnographic. Because many of the stories we tell are not our own, we heard them from the people. We put them together, contextualised them, put them in a situation, in a context, you know? But the stories are theirs*. […] *Before writing, we all have meetings together, assemblies where Nino and I take notes and hear what is important to people. We take stimuli. Then we put in some creativity of our own.* (Giovanni)

However, in practice, some obstacles, obligations and difficult choices cannot be avoided. *"Then, we always confront them anyway because we propose our syntheses*

and they say 'ah, yes', 'no but'... and we slowly..." (Nino). The second director added: *"Sometimes you have to write for that one person. This actor has to say this, wants to say that, and we write it so"* (Giovanni). If we assume that the end product is what the community brings forth, the process is very much about leadership and individual contributions. *"Yes, because what we do is not just entertainment, it's everything. Some people say, 'I thought that this thing would be put like this', 'but no, more beautiful, like this'. For every little thing we do, it's like that"* (Giulio). The main challenge in terms of social innovation is to pursue "a more distributive and collaborative leadership" (Sørensen, Torfing, 2013: 6). Although, as we have seen, in practice an extremely challenging process, leaders "must work within the constraints imposed by voluntary action and shared power. Typically, then, their role is to facilitate rather than to direct" (Ansell, Gash, 2012: 5). Leadership is a particularly responsible and crucial task in heritage performances, as also observed by Vrtovec Beno: "For example, performers must be careful not to offend or ridicule the shared heritage, which places a burden on producers to create an appropriate performance, and to communicate the content within the community" (Vrtovec Beno, 2023: 114). In our case, however, it is important to stress that this is a highly diffuse responsibility, as each individual involved in the Poor Theatre contributes ideas that are put into practice.

Conclusion

The ethnographic research and theoretical discussions presented in this paper contribute to the broader theoretical reflection on the connection between social innovation and intangible heritage, emphasizing the drivers of place, participation, social values, collective memory, and collaborative leadership. Within the conceptual framework, I identify three fundamental common features of intangible heritage and social innovation. First, the temporal dimension: at their core, both concepts are oriented towards addressing present and future needs. In the case study presented, the community tackles its challenges primarily through theatre, confronting local everyday life and significant global issues while reimagining the local past to meet current and future needs (e.g. Harrison, 2012). Second, the community-based dimension: the role of a specific community is always pivotal, whether in heritage creation processes or in social innovation. These initiatives are typically created by the community and for the community. Third, the social process dimension: both social innovation (e.g. Christmann et al., 2020; O'Shaughnessy et al., 2023) and critical heritage studies (e.g. Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2012) emphasize a social and collaborative process rather than a final product.

Thus, I understand the autodrama of the Poor Theatre as a collective creative process of heritage making with socially progressive outcomes, engaging the drivers of place, participation, social values, collective memory, and collaborative leadership.

The development and maintenance of a cohesive local community depend on fostering all five key drivers. However, in exploring these various issues, it became evident that challenges continually emerge and that creativity is crucial in the process. We witness the changes that the local community must adapt to and the difficulties it must face. Heritage studies can significantly contribute to the field of social innovation by highlighting that local development is inherently fraught with tensions, difficulties, and challenges, as it involves considering multiple voices and diverse perspectives. While heritage studies have a long tradition of adopting such a critical perspective, only in recent years has the importance of multivocality – encompassing tensions and conflicts – in the field of social innovation been recognized (e.g. Brandsen et al., 2016; Christmann et al., 2020). Conversely, by integrating the concept of social innovation into heritage studies, we encourage consideration of the "socially progressive outcomes" (Smith, 2011: 23) of heritage.

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Teatro Povero di Monticchiello: na skupnosti temelječa socialna inovacija in nesnovna dediščina na toskanskem podeželju

S povezovanjem konceptov dediščine in socialnih inovacij je mogoče pridobiti nova praktična in teoretska spoznanja. Zanimivo je, da so bile socialne inovacije redko obravnavane v okviru dediščine kljub številnim podobnostim, ki jih je mogoče opaziti, zlasti če dediščino razumemo kot ustvarjalno ukvarjanje s preteklostjo za potrebe sedanjosti in prihodnosti (prim. Harrison, 2012). Socialne inovacije so v literaturi večinoma razumljene kot inovativne družbene prakse, katerih cilj je zadovoljti družbene potrebe na boljši način kot obstoječe rešitve. Cilj te raziskave je razviti okvir za preučevanje na skupnosti temelječih socialnih inovacij in nesnovne dediščine z uporabo teorije družbene ustvarjalnosti in socialnih inovacij na podeželju, kot so jo predlagali André idr. (2013), ter ga uporabiti za konkretno študijo primera.

V prispevku se osredinjam na avtodramo, ki jo vsako leto organizira Teatro Povero di Monticchiello (Gledališče revnih v Monticchiellu) . Monticchiello je naselje z nekaj več kot sto prebivalci v toskanski dolini Val d'Orcia, ki je od leta 2004 na Unescovem seznamu svetovne dediščine. Od leta 1967 do danes krajani vsako leto uprizorijo gledališke predstave s poudarkom na osebnih in družbenih pripovedih o lastnih izkušnjah, preteklosti, težavah, vrednotah, težnjah in pogledih na prihodnost v kontekstu vsakdanjega življenja v kraju. Poleti jih (amaterski) gledališki igralci uprizarjajo dva tedna (v preteklosti tri tedne).

Družbeno prakso obravnavam kot socialno inovacijo in nesnovno dediščino, pri čemer opredelim tri temeljne skupne značilnosti nesnovne dediščine in socialnih inovacij. Prvič, časovna razsežnost: oba koncepta sta v svojem bistvu usmerjena v zadovoljevanje sedanjih in prihodnjih potreb na podlagi izkušenj iz preteklih praks in razumevanja preteklosti. Drugič, na skupnosti temlječa razsežnost: navadno je vloga skupnosti osrednjega pomena tako v procesih ustvarjanja dediščine kot tudi socialnih inovacij. Tretjič, razsežnost družbenega procesa: raziskave socialnih inovacij (npr. Christmann idr., 2020; O'Shaughnessy idr., 2023) in kritične študije dediščine (npr. Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2012) poudarjajo in osvetljujejo družbeni in sodelovalni proces in ne končnega produkta. Na podlagi etnografske raziskave poglobljeno preučujem te razsežnosti, ki so podlaga za celostno razumevanje ustvarjalne in inovativne družbene prakse.

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How to Stage Soviet Operas in the 21st Century: Navigating Russian Music Heritage amidst Revival and Boycott

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In the midst of the Russo-Ukrainian war, the discussion on "Soviet" operas abroad acquired a new dimension. The parallel occurrences of boycotting Russian music and the resurgence of Soviet Russian music provoke questions about the power music embodies, while also challenging the notion of music as detached from the current political turmoil. This paper frames the complex persona of Sergey Prokofiev and his two "Soviet" operas within the context of the recent resurgence of Soviet operatic productions in Russia.

▪ **Keywords**: opera, Sergey Prokofiev, Stalinism, music heritage, 21st century

Med rusko-ukrajinsko vojno je razpravljanje o »sovjetski« operi zunaj Rusije dobilo nove razsežnosti. Vzporedno pojavljanje bojkota ruske glasbe in ponovni vzpon sovjetske ruske glasbe sprožata vprašanja o moči, ki jo glasba uteleša, hkrati pa spodbijata pojmovanje glasbe kot ločene od političnih dogajanj. Članek uokvirja kompleksno osebnost Sergeja Prokofjeva in njegovih dveh »sovjetskih« oper v kontekstu nedavne ponovne oživitve sovjetske operne produkcije v Rusiji.

▪ **Ključne besede**: opera, Sergej Prokofjev, stalinizem, glasbena dediščina, 21. stoletje

Introduction

When discussing music in the context of heritage and tradition, the first thing that comes to mind is folk music, perceived as a genuine and accessible collective effort passed down from one generation to another. Therefore, Western classical or academic music is often not the primary consideration when reflecting on heritage and tradition. Nonetheless, the pervasive influence of classical music in shaping national and local identities is omnipresent, embodied, for instance, in edibles such as Mozartkugeln offered to delighted tourists in Salzburg, or in the romanticized image of Venetian gondoliers serenading with Italian operatic arias. Similarly, in Russia, the grandeur of classical music, particularly large-scale scenic forms such as opera and ballet, is a crucial element of the imperial legacy that continues to thrive on stages in Russia and abroad, symbolizing Russian culture in both local and global contexts. Acknowledging the truth of the previous claim, exploring classical music heritage is essential, or at least thought-provoking, as it provides a key to understanding the broader picture of Russian cultural heritage and its role in contemporary contexts. Moreso, in current times, the Russian heritage of the past has unveiled its unbreakable connection with the present in a very tangible way. Namely, the current Russian aggression in Ukraine has sparked an uncommon public debate on Russian musical heritage at the global level.

We find ourselves in a peculiar time when classical music, often viewed as a relic, an anachronistic marvel accessible to a limited population, has suddenly become part of a broader political discussion.

Given that the scope of this highly intricate topic exceeds the limits of a journal paper, the research coordinates were positioned with great precision. To effectively address the broad and complex issues related to *what* and *why* enters the process of heritagization, the decision was made to focus on a single artistic figure as a starting point for a more extensive discussion. The composer in question is Sergey Prokofiev (1891-1953), and the focus is not on any of his music but specifically on his two Soviet operas,[1] *Semyon Kotko* (1940), which portrays the Civil War (1917–1923) in a Ukrainian village, and *The Story of a Real Man* (*Povest' o nastoyashchem cheloveke*, 1948), based on the story of a real-life Soviet hero, Aleksey Mares'yev (1916-2001), during World War II. Despite some scholars declaring the demise of opera and viewing it as detached from any contemporary relevance, many are nevertheless opposed to such statements – such voices include literary and cultural studies scholar Herbert Lindenberger (2010), and also cultural anthropologist and opera studies scholar Vlado Kotnik who contends that, in modern times, "the machinery of opera is not only being kept alive, […] but it is also growing steadily", concluding that "the opera system is becoming larger and more complex than during its supposed heyday" (Kotnik, 2016: 105).

As early as the 1920s, opera began to be recognized as fertile ground for propagating Soviet ideology (Tarakanov, 2005). This led to the genre's significant transformation in what musicologists now refer to as the Soviet or Stalinist opera project of the 1930s (see Bullock, 2006; Frolova-Walker, 2006; Vlasova, 2017; Seinen, 2019). Suddenly, the criteria for evaluating art began to operate under entirely different norms, and operatic authors assumed a dual role, functioning as both artists and ideologists simultaneously. Of course, the connection between opera and politics/state was well-established since the genre's early days, and extends beyond the case of the Soviet/Stalinist opera project and its purported current revival. Political and opera studies scholar Mitchell Cohen dedicates his relatively recent monograph to the "political operas", describing them as those that "address politics and political ideas directly or indirectly; or that harbour important political implications; or that say or suggest something important about the politics of the times in which they were written (and sometimes about our own times – or apparently so)" (Cohen, 2017: xiii). However, what happens when the political operas in question address political ideas rather explicitly? Furthermore, and echoing the latter part of Cohen's statement, what do these operas reveal about their own times, and more importantly, about our own?

[1] In the context of this paper, "Soviet opera" refers not only to operas composed during the Soviet era and within Soviet territory, but more specifically, it pertains to operas that encapsulate the Soviet grand narrative, subjectivity, and historicity. In essence these operas revolve around Soviet topics and subjects.

The aim of this paper, anchored in the fields of critical heritage and opera studies, is to address the ambiguous status of Soviet operas with Soviet themes in the 21st century, particularly in Russia. More specifically, it explores the circumstances under which the operas originally designed to reinforce Soviet mythology and support the construction of a new Soviet historical narrative are performed in contemporary times. The central part of this study, formulated as a case study of Prokofiev's Soviet operas and their contemporary afterlives, employs thematic analysis of data obtained from newspaper articles, music criticism, and interviews following recent stagings of the operas. This approach was chosen to gain firsthand perspectives and insights into the overarching question of this study. The collected data, situated within the context of multiple ongoing academic debates, aims to elucidate whether these operas, in light of current circumstances, can ever be considered merely as artistic relics; given their complex political and ideological implications, and their incorporation into the contemporary cultural landscape aligning with current aggressive Russian foreign policies.

Russian aggression and art in current times

In the midst of the ongoing Russian aggression against Ukraine, the question of performing Russian music has become a highly contentious and provocative issue. The often conflicting viewpoints and the difficulty in considering nuances when addressing specific cases make it challenging to establish a uniform approach for the global musical community. The banning of Russian composers and performers began spreading rapidly following the fateful events of February 2022 and continues at the time of writing this text. For example, the 2nd Karol Szymanowski International Competition in Katowice banned the performance of Russian composers, citing "current sensitivities in Poland to Russian culture" and as "a gesture of solidarity with the Ukrainian people" as reasons (Salazar, 2023). Ukraine's former Minister of Culture, Oleksandr Tkachenko, called for a boycott of Russian culture, including Tchaikovsky, which sparked a range of opposing opinions in the West. Many argued that classical music transcends the realm of aggressive politics and should be exempted (The Guardian, 2022). Furthermore, Tchaikovsky faced another ban, this time by the Cardiff Philharmonic Orchestra (Quinn, 2022). On the other hand, La Scala's decision to open a new season in December 2022 with Modest Musorgsky's opera *Boris Godunov* stirred strong opinions and even led to protests on the opening night (Bianco, 2023). In Berlin, Russian soprano Anna Netrebko's return to the Berlin State Opera stage also prompted protests (Jordan, 2023). Conversely, the Vienna State Opera firmly supported its Russian artists and did not respond to demands for their ban (The Violin Channel, 2022).

In defending the decision to perform Prokofiev's *War and Peace*, Serge Dorny, the general director of the Bayerische Staatsoper, adeptly addresses the core query echoing

through the musical world. He begins by acknowledging the polarizing nature of the issue while also highlighting the peril inherent in this cultural witch hunt:

> Would it not be absurd to banish the entirety of Russian music, the entirety of Russian culture from our halls? Of course, the dilemma is evident: If we play Russian music, we support Putin's propaganda, say some. If we do not play Russian music, we confirm the image of the Russophobic West and therefore also support Putin's propaganda, say others. We could simply replace Tchaikovsky, Shostakovich, Rachmaninoff, Prokofiev and their peers, as the repertoire would still be extensive enough – with Strauss, Wagner, Puccini, it would not, however, necessarily be any more straightforward. Because questions also remain with these composers as well. If we set strict standards, we will soon have to remove more from our programmes than we would like to. (Dorny, 2023)

These are just a few recent examples, yet they vividly illustrate the emergence of a fervent debate, one that remains without a definitive resolution. German musicologist Christoph Flamm, specializing in Russian and Soviet music among other fields, provides a comprehensive overview of the ongoing boycott of Russian music. He contextualizes this movement within the backdrop of 20th-century European political upheavals and numerous other cultural bans. Flamm cautions against a blanket approach to boycotting Russian music and advocates for a critical assessment when determining what warrants a boycott and for what reasons (Flamm, 2022: 352). Moreover, while Flamm emphasizes that many of the composers facing boycott have no direct relevance to our contemporary times or to Putin's Russia, he nevertheless acknowledges the existence of compositions that align with and bolster Russian imperialistic, chauvinistic, and militant tendencies (ibid.: 353). As stated in his concluding remark:

> To say that music is fundamentally unrelated to politics is not only naive; it is objectively false. In this regard, a boycott of certain works for moral reasons can be absolutely justified, and it contributes to a much-needed reflection on the layers of meaning in such pieces, which should also be treated as a problematic cultural heritage even in times of peace. (ibid.)

In a separate study, Flamm delves deeper into the enduring European tradition of depicting political and military aggression through music, cautioning that "[s]ometimes art reveals its ugly side: a twisted grimace of xenophobia and chauvinism" (Flamm, 2021: 22). Moreover, he advocates for the role of musicology in unearthing concealed or overlooked contexts and subtexts. This, he argues, serves as a vital means against indulging in an uninformed appreciation of pieces tainted by sentiments of hatred and aggression (ibid.: 21).

If we adhere to Flamm's proposed framework, then Soviet Russian music, and opera in particular, should be approached with meticulous consideration. It is impossible to ignore the fact that Soviet operas, particularly the ones dealing with Soviet topicality and subjectivity served to perpetuate the Soviet mythology on the stage, are unambiguously permeated by ideology, and reflect Soviet militant and aggressive politics. In an era where even figures like Tchaikovsky and Glinka are subjected to scrutiny, one cannot help but hold Soviet composers to an even higher critical standard. In her poignant article, musicologist Marina Frolova-Walker, being well aware of the new Cold War emerging in front of our eyes, advocates for forging an inclusive music history, amalgamating the parallel history of the Soviet bloc into a unified historical canon. However, when juxtaposed with the question of performance, especially of the operas, the task of creating an inclusive music history appears notably less daunting. Because indeed, writing history is one thing – but perpetuating history on the stage for a wide audience is a very hard-to-overlook endeavour. Furthermore, Frolova-Walker, while not in any way condoning Russian aggression towards Ukraine, acknowledges the controversies surrounding Russia and the USSR in contemporary academia. She observes: "We see also a certain *Denkverbot*, where particular shades of debate become taboo and anyone who deviates from the standard description of Russia as 'the evil empire' becomes a 'Russia apologist' or 'Putin's useful idiot'" (Frolova-Walker, 2018: 16).

Indirectly, Flamm drew a line between music disconnected from our contemporary era and that which might carry some relevance to it. The inquiry arises: What relevance does Soviet music hold in our current times? While Prokofiev and several other Soviet composers may no longer be alive, and though the tradition of music depicting wars is a widespread European convention, is the Soviet Union truly just an entity of the past, a remnant entirely disconnected from our contemporaneity? This is a complex query requiring a multifaceted approach that extends beyond the boundaries of musicology. Notably, contemporary Russia's drive towards (re-)Stalinization and the strategic manipulation of historical memories from the Stalinist era have been extensively explored within scholarly circles (see Lipman, 2013; Kolesnikov, 2015; Khapaeva, 2016) even before the momentous events of February 2022. Considering this context, can the apparent resurgence of the Soviet operatic repertoire on Russian stages be seen as surprising? Can its symptomatic nature be disregarded?

To succinctly summarize the thoughts and discussions presented thus far, three primary critical lenses emerge for assessing the "appropriateness" of certain Soviet operas resurfacing in contemporary times. The first lens is the historical-political context, encompassing both the original and the contemporary milieu; the second pertains to the operatic narrative or theme; and the third revolves around the individual, specifically the composer. While there might be simpler examples to apply to this matrix, the deliberate choice here is Sergey Prokofiev and his body of work. Prokofiev's case demonstrates the inherent challenge of determining which compositions and creators

should be included in the canon, and under what circumstances, more vividly than any other Soviet composer. This paper does not delve into Prokofiev's ballets and operas that have already entrenched themselves in the global canon, nor those lacking a discernible and vivid connection to the totalitarian regime of their time.[2] Instead, its focus lies in exploring the contemporary fate of Prokofiev's two operas on a Soviet topic: *Semyon Kotko* (1940) and *The Story of a Real Man* (1948). Through an examination of these works and their recent revival, the following segment of this paper seeks to unravel the intricate web of associations evoked by these operatic resurrections. Additionally, it aims to illuminate insights into Prokofiev's artistic persona, Russia's current assertive politics, the role of art in the 21st century, and the nuanced treatment of difficult legacies in general.

Prokofiev on the margins

While Sergey Prokofiev is undeniably one of the most celebrated composers of the 20th century and requires no formal introduction, his artistic persona and his association with the Soviet Union and Stalinism warrant a fresh examination, which is indeed receiving attention in current times. In his work, musicologist Richard Taruskin portrays Prokofiev as a tragic figure, a victim of the Stalinist regime. He draws comparisons between Prokofiev and Mozart (Taruskin, 2020: 450), even asserting Prokofiev as the sole 20th-century composer to achieve household name recognition (ibid.: 466). However, despite this sympathetic portrayal, Taruskin also acknowledges the moral complexity inherent in Prokofiev's body of work, dissecting the dilemmas it presents to contemporary audiences. Detailing Prokofiev's challenging political circumstances and the profound impact of the regime's constraints on both his artistic output and personal life, Taruskin ultimately arrives at the conclusion:

> But if we accept the proposition that the drama of Prokofiev's life was an authentic tragedy, does that mean that it transcends moral issues? I certainly do not think so. There are many moral implications that complicate the story far beyond the rather simplistic tale I've been telling of wrong turns and dire consequences. […] Our relationship to his music is fraught willy-nilly with moral implications – our problems, not his. (ibid.: 465)

[2] For instance, prime examples are his ballets *Romeo and Juliet*, premiered in 1940, and *Cinderella*, first showcased in 1945. While these pieces were influenced by the prevailing Soviet cultural and artistic policies of the time, they do not vividly reflect the predominant ideology and artistic doctrine, unlike his two operas centred on Soviet themes, which will be further explored within the context of this text.

Moreover, Taruskin devotes particular attention to Prokofiev's music created due to his Soviet commitments and compositions intended to glorify Stalin and the regime (ibid.: 467–468). While Taruskin condemns these compositions as "objectionable", he also acknowledges the fluidity and continuous negotiation inherent in determining the onset of objectionability (ibid.: 469). Simultaneously, he recognizes that Prokofiev was not the sole composer to craft works in homage to a patron and that such agreements echo throughout the annals of European musical history (ibid.: 470). Nevertheless, akin to Flamm, Taruskin introduces the element of contemporary influence as a criterion into this discourse:

> Unless we are historians, we don't know the Protestants who faced persecution under Louis XIV or the conscripts who died for the sake of his vanity. But Stalin's victims or, rather, those who mourn them are still among us. It is in part for their sake that I object to hearing Stalin praised from the stage of Carnegie Hall, and in particular to see comfortable and oblivious people cheering at the end of a panegyric to a butcher because Prokofiev has provided it with such a nice package. (ibid.: 471)

Within the landscape of Soviet composers during Stalin's era, Prokofiev stands out as a rare figure who transcends the prevailing mediocrity. His undeniable talent and enduring legacy in music history, coupled with the mythologized tragedy he endured under the Stalinist regime, can easily lead one to overlook certain aspects of his body of work that might be considered morally and ideologically unsuitable in today's context. Moreover, Prokofiev's identity exists on the margins, or better yet, borders: he embodies both the "Soviet" while also being rehabilitated from his "Soviet affiliation" within the grand scale of time and history. He represents the national and imperial as much as the European, global, and universal. However, Prokofiev's marginality and the ambiguous nature of his Soviet identity can easily be used as justification for an uncritical approach to performing his unequivocally Soviet compositions. To delve deeper, while the two operas under examination in this paper reflect Stalinist ideals of hegemonic masculinity and militarism, the romanticized story of Prokofiev's life makes us believe that he composed these not out of a deep belief in the system, but rather almost under duress. How does one reconcile these contrasting elements? And if we were to come to terms with the idea that they might be irreconcilable, how can we approach performing Prokofiev's works in the 21st century? Recent revivals of Soviet operas, including Prokofiev's two operas on Soviet topics, demonstrate that both classical music and Soviet-era music in particular bear a weighty political significance far beyond what might be expected from an art form seemingly shielded by the veil of purity, transcending the petty and often violent politics simmering in the distant background.

The cases of Prokofiev's two Soviet operas

Semyon Kotko, Prokofiev's first opera centring on a Soviet narrative, although relatively overlooked compared to some of his other theatrical works, maintains a relatively enduring tradition of performance both in the Soviet Union and Russia. Premiered in 1940, the opera portrays the eponymous protagonist's return from the front to his village, only to confront the post-war revolutionary turmoil, where local detractors of the regime and the remaining German troops clash against the Bolsheviks. Unlike another contemporary opera, Tikhon Khrennikov's 1939 *V buryu* (*Into the Storm*), which prominently features Lenin on stage, the "Soviet" affiliation of *Semyon Kotko* is primarily discernible through its thematic overtones, embodied in the conflict between military forces preserving and challenging the newly established socialist rule. As asserted by musicologist Nathan Seinen, Prokofiev aimed to create an opera free from propaganda, committed to the "timeless values of music and drama" (Seinen, 2019: 23). Direct references to the Soviet regime are, thus, relatively scarce: for instance, upon his return, Semyon informs the local villagers about the current political situation and the activities of the Soviet authorities; the establishment of Soviet rule in the village is implied through the presence of a village Soviet, chaired by Semyon's comrade Remenyuk. Yet, despite Prokofiev's aspiration, the opera nevertheless remains inextricably linked to the Soviet context, reflecting the prevailing ideology and contributing to the construction of the Soviet origin myth.

Notably, a revival staged in the Mariinsky Theatre in 1999 by director Yury Aleksandrov still enjoys regular performances in St. Petersburg and numerous other Russian cities. Intriguingly, the opera's resurgence was unexpectedly unrelated to any particular political anniversary or jubilee; rather, as reported by musicologist Iosif Rayskin, it emerged as an autonomous homage to the Russian 20th century (Rayskin, 2014: 56). As elucidated by the director himself, and recounted by Rayskin:

> History is neither good nor bad – it is our history. It is a story of brothers rising against brothers, daughters betraying fathers, of Russian people losing their homeland in the bloody turmoil of the Civil War […]. Somebody, Aleksandrov recalled, suggested changing the text of "Long live Lenin!" and so on. We rejected that idea because it is our chronicle, our Richard III. (ibid.)

The production design by Semyon Pastukh and costume design by Galina Solov'yova are still in use as of 2023.[3] The brutalist metallic hammer and sickle positioned

[3] The images showcasing the set and costume designs are available for viewing at the following link: Mariinsky Theatre. URL: https://www.mariinsky.ru/playbill/repertoire/opera/kotko (accessed 2.11.2023).

at the centre-back of the stage, accompanied by red flags bearing the same symbol, along with three imposing figures of hanged communists, are now perhaps even more menacing than they were in 1999. However, opinions differ on the use of communist iconography on the stage. Scottish music critic Gregor Tassie, for instance, does not perceive a particular problem with it, remarking: "The scenes with red flags are no more disturbing than many operas of the last two hundred years which have political themes present" (Tassie, 2021).

Conversely, the first-ever performance of *Semyon Kotko* by a non-Russian orchestra and choir occurred in Amsterdam in 2016. Russian conductor Vladimir Jurowski presented to the audience a concert rendition of Prokofiev's opera, coupled with a politically-aware approach to the performance, acknowledging the ongoing turmoil in Ukraine. Jurowski concluded the performance by repeating Taras Shevchenko's poem *Testament* (*Zapovit*) in Ukrainian language, which, translated to Russian, originally appears in the 4th act of the partiture (see Prokofiev, 1960). This choice, as described by a certain music critic, resulted in "a deeply moving result. The lady next to me could not contain her tears" (Pinedo, 2016). Specifically, as outlined in the program notes, Jurowski contextualized his decision to repeat the poem as "a personal dedication to ALL people populating today's Ukraine and Crimea" (Camilleri, 2016).

In contrast to *Semyon Kotko*, Prokofiev's final opera, *The Story of a Real Man*, faced a markedly different fate. Premiering in front of a closed audience, it met immediate dismissal, receiving only sporadic performances over the years and failing to establish itself as an integral piece within the Soviet or Russian repertoire. The opera depicts the extraordinary story of Soviet aviation hero and double amputee Aleksey Mares'yev during WWII, tracing his metamorphosis toward becoming the Soviet "real man". As if his "initial form" wasn't already remarkable, Aleksey loses both of his legs in a plane crash, is transferred to Moscow where he receives prosthetic legs, learns to walk again, and ultimately returns to combat. Aleksey, being a symbol of ideal Stalinist masculinity, and the opera itself, even more ideologically potent than previously mentioned *Semyon Kotko*, appeared excessively ideologically charged for Western performance. Additionally, its perceived lack of artistic depth prevented audiences from overlooking its overt ideological connotations, as perhaps occurs in the case of *Semyon Kotko*. Consequently, the opera never graced Western stages. Yet, its reception in Russia had not markedly differ until quite recently. In recent decades, the concert version of the opera was staged in 2002 in Mariinsky Theatre under the baton of Valery Gergiyev.[4] Interestingly, Gergiyev is an avid supporter of Vladimir Putin and was recently dubbed "Russia's most powerful classical musician" (Ross, 2022). Furthermore, in 2005, albeit in fragmented form, the opera was performed in the Saratov Opera and Ballet Theatre,

[4] More information on performances of the opera in Mariinsky Theatre can be found on the following link: Mariinsky Theatre. URL: https://www.mariinsky.ru/about/exhibitions/prokofiev125/povest_1948 (accessed 2.11.2023).

directed by Andrey Sergeyev and conducted by Yury Kochnev,[5] commemorating the 60th anniversary of the Soviet WWII victory (Kovalevsky, 2005). However, the opera was staged in its full version for the first time in 2015 in Vladivostok at the Primorsky Stage of Mariinsky Theatre.[6] It was directed by Irkin Gabitov and conducted by Anton Lubchenko as part of the Na Strazhe Mira festival,[7] celebrating the 70th anniversary of the Soviet WWII triumph. As elaborated by Vladimir Moroz, who sang the main role:

> It is impossible to imagine a more noble theme for an artist than the defence of the homeland. We all live thanks to our grandfathers and great-grandfathers. And throughout life, we must carry our gratitude to them for this feat. We have something to be proud of, something to tell our children. This opera is another tribute to the heroes who defended the homeland from invaders. (Sholik, 2015)

The 2015 performance of the opera abounds in melodramatic patriotic references and distressing visual imagery. It is difficult to remain indifferent to scenes where Aleksey, injured, crawls through a pile of lifeless frozen bodies, or when he, frightened and psychologically tormented, pleads with doctors for mercy during the amputation.[8] Prokofiev's portrayal of masculinity, or the ideal "real man" that Aleksey strives toward becoming, is characterized by superhuman resilience, indomitable will, and ultimate sacrifice in the fulfilment of one's duty. The opera's didactic nature, educating the audience in correct performance of both masculinity and patriotism, has not diminished in contemporary revivals; rather, the political backdrop against which this operatic revival is positioned reinforces the message even more strongly. I interpret this performance as a deliberate effort to draw on historical legacies to legitimize and motivate current military endeavours, thus creating a bridge between past sacrifices and present undertakings.

According to a certain journalist's review after the premiere, Prokofiev's opera is "highly relevant because it is essential to introduce the young generation to our Russian heroes", but also that "[w]e are duty-bound to tell the youth about individuals like Mares'yev, as it is crucial to instil a love for one's country" (Neshchedrin, 2015). Additionally, another journalist emphasizes the pressing need to bolster patriotic

[5] Although information about this performance taking place can be found on the theatre's website (see Saratov Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre. URL: https://www.operabalet.ru/playbill/?y=2005&m=12&d=6, accessed 2.11.2023), more information can be found in various news articles found online. See, for instance, Kovalevsky (2005).

[6] Until 2016 known as Primorsky Opera and Ballet Theatre.

[7] In English "On Guard of Peace".

[8] The whole performance can be watched on YouTube, see: @Anton Lubchenko. 2020. S. Prokof'yev. *Povest'o nastoyashchem cheloveke*. Primorskiy teatr operï i baleta, A. Lubchenko. YouTube, 18 November, duration 2:11:21. URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cr4o75y41CI (accessed 20.7.2024).

sentiments within contemporary Russian society, highlighting the immense ideological potential inherent in the operatic genre:

> Strengthening the patriotic dimension in the public life of our country requires a corresponding artistic representation. […] Opera as an art form is much more conservative and upholds the ideological front with compositions created during the era of the great Soviet style, which in recent decades have fallen into undeserved oblivion. (Khaknazarov, 2015)

In an interview, Gabitov explained his motivation to pursue staging of this almost forgotten opera by Prokofiev. He articulated his aspiration to work on Prokofiev's three war operas, *Semyon Kotko*, *War and Peace*, and *The Story of a Real Man*, as follows: "Completely different wars, but everywhere there is the Russian person, the Russian spirit, Russian culture, and Russian national worldviews as they have been formed over two to three hundred years". When prompted to elaborate on the meaning of the "national worldview", Gabitov explained: "It is love for the Motherland, it is selflessness, it is self-sacrifice. That's what Prokofiev's last opera and its hero, pilot Aleksey Mares'yev, are all about." Responding to why this opera now, Gabitov added: "To know that one can live a second life, return to duty, even if misfortune has shattered you! What it takes is to be a person with inner strength! A real person! Russian!" (Zhzhenova, 2015).

However, the celebration of the 70th jubilee extended beyond the staging of Prokofiev's *The Story of a Real Man*. Gabitov also staged Kirill Molchanov's *Zori zdes' tikhiye* (*The Dawns Here are Quiet*) at the Tsaritsyn Opera Theatre in Volgograd.[9] Molchanov's opera was also performed in a concert version at the Mariinsky Theatre, conducted by Zaurbek Gugkayev.[10] Notably, this opera continues to be performed, firmly establishing itself within the repertoire. Recently, in January 2023, it was performed in a concert version to commemorate the Day of Full Leningrad Liberation from the Siege of Nazi Troops.[11] Another interesting case is *Krïm* (*Crimea*), inspired by Marian Koval's opera *Sevastopol'tsï* (*People of Sevastopol*), directed by Yury Aleksandrov and staged in fateful 2014.[12] This production is presented in an unusual genre described by the director as an "opera-rally". While preserving the music, Aleksandrov completely reworked the score, dividing the narrative into three temporal layers: the Crimean War, World War II, and the present day, integrating contemporary events in Ukraine (see Vol'gust, 2014).

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[9] See Tsaritsyn Opera. URL: https://www.tzaropera.ru/repertoire/opera/24-a-zori-zdes-tikhie (accessed 2.11.2023).

[10] See Mariinsky Theatre. URL: https://www.mariinsky.ru/playbill/playbill/2015/2/8/3_1900 (accessed 2.11.2023).

[11] Mariinsky Theatre. URL: https://www.mariinsky.ru/playbill/playbill/2023/1/27/3_1900 (accessed 2.11.2023).

[12] More on Yury Aleksandrov's artistic biography can be read on the following link: St. Petersburg Opera. URL: https://www.spbopera.ru/en/troupe/yuriy-aleksandrov (accessed 2.11.2023).

Aleksandrov conceived the idea amid the turmoil in Ukraine, emphasizing that the performance entry would be free, asserting that "you can't sell tickets for a rally" (Tsinkler, 2015). Aleksandrov also staged Yuly Meytus's *Molodaya gvardiya* (*The Young Guard*),[13] premiered in 2016, and Vano Muradeli's *Oktyabr': 17-ogo* (*October the 17th*) in 2017 to commemorate 100 years since the Revolution.[14]

What these operatic revivals are reinforcing are, first of all, the continuous mythologisation of the Soviet/Stalinist past, second of all, the revival of that same past, and third of all, the continuity with it. In earlier work, Kotnik asserts that opera functions as "an interpellation system, which transforms myth into reality, art into spectacularity, and society into rituality", and it is capable of "dispersion of modern mythology in relation to society" (Kotnik, 2004: 335). Namely, Kotnik acknowledges opera's universal mythological and mythologizing potential, asserting that even when reflecting contemporary themes, operas retain a degree of "mythical" quality, noting how the audiences perpetually participate "in operistic reanimation of this 'mythical context'" (Kotnik, 2004: 325). Naturally, the cosmogonic myth, in case of Soviet opera, is not set in a distant and hazy ahistoric realm, but in 1917, while the myths of heroes, instead of figures such as Hercules or Prometheus, oftentimes follow real-life heroes of the regimes. Indeed, in Soviet narratives, historicity and mythology, instead of being antonyms, suddenly merge into the same concept; although set in contemporary times, and although highly historically charged, Soviet operas have a pronounced mythological quality. Cultural policy scholar Ruth Bereson approaches opera as a state-legitimising ceremonial ritual, "a symbol of the continuity of governments", and "an integral part of state ceremonial" (Bereson, 2002: 3). However, when viewed within the broader context of the Stalinist and Soviet operatic revivals, as well as a potential tool of establishing historical continuity with the totalitarian regime of the past, to echo Bereson's approach, Prokofiev's "Soviet" revival loses its benign appearance. Upon closer examination of the artistic quality present in some of the operas, it becomes evident that *art* wasn't the primary, or even a significant determining factor in selecting what gets access to the contemporary stage. The dominant criterion was ideology, the ritualistic perpetuation of history on stage for a broad audience. The objective extended beyond the celebration and commemoration of significant Soviet anniversaries and history; it also aimed to establish connection between Soviet past and the position of present Russia in a broader geopolitical context.

[13] Interestingly enough, Meytus (1903-1997) was an Ukrainian, and the opera *The Young Guard* is originally written in Ukrainian language.

[14] Another version of the title found in online sources is *Oktyabr' 17*.

Soviet opera as a difficult heritage?

It is difficult to approach the heritage of Soviet opera in one singular way. While the musicological instinct leans towards examining the score in search of answers when addressing the issue of present-day Soviet operatic revivals, the key in disentangling this intricate trend turned out to be the mere act of acknowledging that music and artistic expression play a minimal role. Instead, it is politics, memory, and power that wield significant influence. Therefore, adopting a mindset that transcends the confines of a single discipline, recognizing Soviet operas primarily as heritage, and delving into critical heritage studies, which grapple with the "complex questions of the power that heritage entails and produces" (Lähdesmäki et al., 2019: 2), could propel us closer to comprehending the current resurgence of Soviet opera on the Russian stages.

As asserted by heritage studies scholar Laurajane Smith, heritage is "a cultural and social process, which engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present" (Smith, 2006: 2). The same sentiment echoes in Rodney Harrison's definition of heritage, which he describes as "an active process of assembling a series of objects, places, and practices that we choose to hold up as a mirror to the present, associated with a particular set of values that we wish to take with us into the future" (Harrison, 2013: 4). Furthermore, Harrison emphasizes the significance and immediacy of delving into heritage by asserting that, "heritage is primarily *not* about the *past*, but instead about our relationship with the *present* and the *future*" (ibid.: 4), further defining it as "a set of attitudes to, and relationships with, the past" (ibid.: 14). As explained by Gustav Wollentz, heritage plays a role "within a landscape for negotiating the meaning of the past in the present" and serves "as an incentive for tracing continuity and/or discontinuity and contributing with a sense of belonging and/or disassociation for individuals, while at the same time directing such incentives towards the future" (Wollentz, 2020: 1–2).

We could perceive Soviet operas as benign *sons de mémoire*,[15] intended to aid remembrance and serve as a conduit linking us to the past; as mere artefacts encapsulating the outdated socialist realist doctrine, Soviet history, the totalitarian regime, meticulous control of artistic production, artistic negotiations, and, for some composers like Prokofiev, real-life tragic human destinies. Perhaps we could approach them as perplexing curiosa too burdened by ideology to be frivolously displayed on global stages. However, despite this perspective, as previously discussed, since these operas are indeed staged and manipulated as a tool in Russian mnemonic politics, linking Soviet militaristic grandeur to present-day martial activities in Ukraine, their status requires thorough re-evaluation.

[15] Could be translated as "sounds of memory". Analogous term to Pierre Nora's (1989) *lieux de memoire*.

As explained by historian David Hoffmann, the Soviet regime crafted a historical account of World War II to unify the populace and validate its governance. Putin's government later revived specific parts of this narrative to strengthen patriotic sentiment in modern Russia (Hoffmann, 2022: 3). Hoffmann even goes as far as proclaiming the memory of World War II as "a pillar of Russian official culture and a centrepiece of national pride" (Hoffmann, 2022: 1). Once contextualized as a vessel of ideology in current Russian WWII commemoration politics, especially amid the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, even Soviet operas by Prokofiev, who successfully solidified his place in global music history, take on a new and deeper significance. As discussed by William Logan and Keir Reeves:

> Governments encourage particular memories and provide rituals and venues for memorialisation, which may be benign if such actions promote the development of tolerant states and societies based on human rights. In many cases, however, state authorities engage in retelling history, inventing traditions and celebrating heritage in ways that serve their own interests, which are often as crude as maintaining a grip on power. (Logan, Reeves, 2009: 2)

Specifically, Logan and Reeves address the concept of "difficult heritage", focusing on sites that represent distressing or shameful events from a nation or community's history. As one of the pioneers in the concept of difficult heritage, Macdonald defines it as "a past that is recognised as meaningful in the present but that is also contested and awkward for public reconciliation with a positive, self-affirming contemporary identity" (Macdonald, 2009: 1). Following this definition, Prokofiev's Soviet body of work cannot be inherently considered difficult, especially from the Russian standpoint, as it doesn't pose a difficulty in constructing a "positive, self-affirming identity". To add on Taruskin's earlier quote in the text (Taruskin, 2020: 465), could this perceived difficulty be exclusive to *our* perspective rather than inherent to Russian understanding? Despite the inclination to label Prokofiev's Soviet operas, or Soviet operas as a whole, as part of difficult heritage, the present dynamics within the Russian commemorative framework suggest they are less "difficult" and more of a "triumphant" heritage. Macdonald's idea of the "identity-affirmative nature of heritage-making" (Macdonald, 2009: 2) holds a dual perspective: while the "liberal" world and its perceptions regarding what fits into the global canon may have dismissed Prokofiev's Soviet works, in Russia, these compositions firmly align with the prevailing political and ideological climate, as evidenced by recent revivals. Is the categorical suppression of heritage, as observed in Western contexts, the sole approach to articulating a critique?

In a thought-provoking article intriguingly titled 'Who's Afraid of Socialist Realism?', musicologist and cellist Alexander Ivashkin provocatively asserts: "Soviet music

still exists, whether they like it or not. The Soviet period lasted for only seventy-three years, but it made an important impact on post-Soviet and Western culture, and on Western understanding of Russian culture" (Ivashkin, 2014: 448). While it is essential to consider Ivashkin's statement in its proper context – acknowledging that the socialist realist afterlives he mentions are deeply intertwined with music and aesthetics – it nonetheless prompts reflection. The issue at hand does not appear to be socialist realism or Soviet music per se – at least not entirely – but rather the nature of the afterlives these cultural forms assume in contemporary times. Imperial remnants, whether manifested in objects, practices, values, or, as in this case, opera (encompassing all these aspects), persist in our present, subtly or overtly influencing contemporary cultural trajectories. In the current climate, where Soviet imperial afterlives are perhaps more pronounced and potentially menacing, one is left to ponder the most appropriate response to them. Although the prevailing approach to these cultural remnants, particularly in music, currently seems to be one of boycott, the recent work of Alexander Raskatov, a composer of Russian descent, Soviet upbringing and an international career, suggests an alternative path.

Namely, in the same article, Ivashkin also references Raskatov and his opera *Sobach'ye serdtse* (*A Dog's Heart*) commissioned by The Netherlands Opera House in Amsterdam and premiered in 2010. Raskatov's opera, notable for its polystylistic nature, employs "Soviet" genres such as revolutionary songs and *chastushka*[16] to create a soundscape for Mikhail Bulgakov's 1925 satire of the Soviet revolution (Ivashkin, 2014: 444). In this context, the sounds associated with the Soviet era are utilized as auditory relics, serving to bridge historical space and time while being imbued with symbolic significance. A rather recent opera by Raskatov, *Animal Farm* first premiered in Amsterdam in 2023, written after Orwell's eponymous allegory of the Soviet and Stalinist regime, resonates even more critically in contemporary times as his previously mentioned work. As explained by the opera's director, Damiano Michieletto:

> The opera has the possibility – including for the many people working together on a performance – of being a mirror of society, and it can take a critical look at the society. My dream is that we will succeed in finding a language which ideally unites words and music, as they did at the end of the 16th century when opera was invented. And I'd like to see us find a socially and politically focused view, as they did in ancient Greece. Ultimately, I'm excited by stories which relate to the world we live in. (Láng, 2023: 24)

[16] A traditional Russian folk genre that deals with topics such as private life, community life, and politics. Although the tradition dates back to before the Revolution, it gained immense popularity during Soviet times.

Raskatov further solidifies the connection to the Soviet past through the libretto. For example, he incorporates quotes from prominent Soviet figures such as Stalin, Trotsky, and Beria, explaining this choice by noting: "When Orwell wrote his book, he did not have all the knowledge we have today about the early years of the Soviet Union" (Van Tongeren, 2023: 64). Furthermore, the opera, dedicated to Dmitry Shostakovich's widow, Irina Antonovna Shostakovich, references and reminisces the sounds of Russian and Soviet classics, Prokofiev and Shostakovich included, as pointed out by dramaturge Sergio Morabito (Morabito, 2023: 17). Moreover, conductor Alexander Soddy highlights the parallels between Raskatov's work and Shostakovich's famously denounced opera *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, particularly "in terms of irony, social polemics and political satire" (Soddy, 2023: 28).

The case of Raskatov's recent oeuvre, dedicated to the critical examination of Soviet and Stalinist histories, illustrates an alternative use of music – specifically opera – in addressing political crises. Interestingly, Raskatov also engages with Soviet afterlives, however, not by summoning them to promote a narrative of historical continuity or to celebrate the grandiose aspects of the Soviet and Stalinist past, but rather as a cautionary tale. His work serves to reveal the dangers of repeating the history, thus offering a critical reflection on the past and its implications for the present.

Conclusion

The resurgence of the Soviet operatic oeuvre on contemporary Russian stages is deeply intertwined with contemporary commemorative policies, dangerous utilization of historical narratives, and, subsequently, the conflict in Ukraine. The contemporary Russian cultural and political landscape vividly demonstrates how music can be actively wielded for political and ideological agendas. It illuminates how the music of a bygone era can be repurposed in constructing national identity, nurturing patriotic sentiments, and strengthening the continuity between Soviet and Russian martiality.

However, the relevance of Soviet and Russian music extends beyond the operatic revival. The various afterlives of Soviet music, whether through the resurgence of nearly forgotten Soviet operatic works on Russian stages or the provocative reinterpretations in Alexander Raskatov's recent compositions, alongside the boycott of Russian music, all point toward one direction – toward the power of the cultural and musical capital, unveiling it as a potent tool of agitation. The operas mentioned, regardless of their treatment of the Soviet past, demonstrate that the genre is not merely a cultural artefact detached from contemporary issues. Instead, they actively contribute to the construction of parallel and opposing cultural narratives. The contrasting treatments of musical heritage – its erasure in some contexts and revival in others – demonstrate that classical music is not merely a relic of the past or anachronistic ritual, but a potent

and relevant vessel of power in the present, participating in and shaping global political and cultural discourse.

It is important to keep in mind that the process of negotiation surrounding heritage reflects less on the past itself and more on our present circumstances and the landscape within which these negotiations unfold. This text, serving as a cautionary narrative, aligning with the perspectives of Taruskin (2020) and Flamm (2021), advocates for a critical approach in determining what, and under what circumstances, should be presented to a wide audience. It warns against perceiving music as purely ethereal, devoid of semantic layers that may harbour, at times, perilous ideologies. This intricate network of boycotts and revivals underscores another critical point: Soviet music in the contemporary world is far from being merely a historical relic. While some remnants of a distant chauvinist past may subtly permeate today's operatic stages and concert halls – echoing Taruskin's earlier sentiments – the influence of Soviet regime and its legacies is more pronounced than one might hope, and so are the uses of the past within the contemporary state policies. To reference Ivashkin's thoughts, we do not have to be afraid of socialist realism, Prokofiev, Soviet, nor Russian music – the real danger pertains to the nature of afterlives this music is given.

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Kako uprizarjati sovjetske opere v 21. stoletju: ruska glasbena dediščina med oživljanjem in bojkotom

Namen članka je preučiti status glasbe in glasbene dediščine, zlasti »sovjetskih« oper Sergeja Prokofjeva, v kontekstu rusko-ukrajinske vojne, ki se je začela leta 2014 in stopnjevala leta 2022. Kompleksnost Prokofjeve osebnosti na presečišču različnih nacionalnih, političnih, ideoloških in umetniških poti osvetli izzive (ne)promoviranja in (ne)izvajanja umetniških del v določenih okoliščinah. Članek se ne poglablja v estetiko in umetniško kakovost kot meril za ocenjevanje primernosti dveh sovjetsko obarvanih oper Prokofjeva, *Semjona Kotka* (1940) in *Zgodbe o resničnem človeku* (1948), temveč ju postavlja v širši okvir trenutnega sovjetskega, zlasti stalinističnega opernega preporoda, ki ga je bilo mogoče opaziti po izbruhu konflikta. Argument proti domnevi, da je nedavna oživitev Prokofjeva posledica resnične želje po ponovni predstavitvi njegovega zapostavljenega opusa širokemu ruskemu občinstvu, je podprt z novo in nenadno aktualnostjo nekaterih drugih sovjetskih oper v zadnjih letih. Poleg tega je ponovni vzpon sovjetske in stalinistične ikonografije, glasbe in pripovedi v ruskih gledališčih lahko tudi znamenje ustvarjanja povezav med sovjetsko preteklostjo in nemirno sodobno rusko politično pokrajino. Sovjetske opere s tega stališča niso več omejene na področje umetnosti ali glasbenih artefaktov,

temveč so instrumentalizirane kot veliki nacional(istič)ni rituali, ki ohranjajo sovjetsko preteklost na odru za širše občinstvo. Medtem ko vključevanje tem, kot so vojne, politika in zlorabe, v zahodne opere ni nič nenavadnega, imajo obravnavane sovjetske opere novo razsežnost, ko so dejavno uporabljene za podporo zgodovinski kontinuiteti, občutku nacionalne identitete in pripadnosti ter kot didaktično orodje, ki občinstvo poučuje o pravilnem izvajanju patriotizma. Ker je proces dediščinjenja aktiven, razkriva več o odnosu do preteklosti kot o preteklosti sami. Skladno s tem nedavne oživitve nekaterih oper Prokofjeva nimajo veliko opraviti s samim Prokofjevom ali domnevno kakovostjo njegovih dveh sovjetskih oper, temveč v veliki meri služijo političnim ciljem v sodobni Rusiji in obsežnemu spominjanju na stalinistično veličino v sodobnem ruskem političnem diskurzu.

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