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Worlds

Digital Aestheticization of Nature /
Digitalna estetizacija narave

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Editorial

Blaž Bajič

"Nature" is notoriously hard to define; its cultural meanings change through time and space, if the notion is to be found at all (Soper 1995; Descola 2013). However, to simplify to the utmost, across diverse intellectual fields, its understanding frequently oscillates between two poles. On one side, realism sees nature as ontologically independent, a realm existing irrespective of human perception or cultural constructs. On the other side, constructivism understands nature as a historical, discursive formation, that is "fabricated" by and through human interactions, interpretations, and ideologies (Kozorog 2015: 117, fn. 1). Still, this split does not imply that there is no "mediation" between "natural fact" and "cultural construction", to use the terms an anthropologist might use.

Nature is, of course, scientifically discovered – regardless of how precisely we might conceive the notion of "discovery" – in concrete socio-historical conditions. The conditions of discovery of a certain scientific theory, however, do not equate to the conditions of its validity, as "the ontological claims of a scientific theory are stronger, being ultimately incompatible with their historicist or transcendental relativization" (Žižek 2012: 908). As such, nature, reduced to "grey", senseless, inhuman formulas, persists beyond meaning, cultural or otherwise, and does not fit comfortably into the abovementioned dichotomy. Thus, one could say that even if nature does not exist (as a reality), it nevertheless insists (as Real).

There seems to be widespread discontent with this aspect of nature in cultural anthropology, cultural studies, history, environmental studies, and, indeed, the humanities in general. In his account of "the emergence of the modern concept of nature" (2013: 57), the French anthropologist Philippe Descola symptomatically focuses on early instances of landscape painting, that is, a form of aestheticization of the environment. To be sure, he does note the mathematising efforts of the likes of Descartes and Copernicus when it comes to the construction of nature. He does this, however, by situating them in the same "way of representing the human environment" (2013: 61) as in landscape painting, one purportedly indissociable from the visual conventions and technologies of the time.

The flipside of such a line of thought might appear to be that every way of "looking at", "representing" or "discovering" nature is equally credible. However, such a position is

not only epistemically relativistic, it is also, as Timothy Morton (2007) claimed, profoundly anti-ecological, insofar as most, if not all, other notions of "nature" implicitly or explicitly rely on an idea of the Whole (imagined, for example, as an Earth Mother, etc.). Morton emphasized that ecological thinking is distinctly modern and possible only once capitalism has penetrated all forms of life, nullifying any notion of coherent and authentic "nature". Importantly, it relied on much the same visual, technological and, indeed, scientific mediations that gave birth to the modern notion of nature (Descola 2013: 61–71). For better or worse, I would argue, it is thus necessary to insist on a distinction between a scientific concept of nature and a multitude of cultural notions going by the same name but referring to something else entirely. An important corollary to this would, of course, be that (the scientific notion of) nature is as alien to most contemporary Europeans as it is to the Achuar, for example. Furthermore, one could speculate if, and in what sense – foreclosure, disavowal, or repression – the former function as negations of the latter.

Still, given the capitalist hegemony of the last two centuries, one would be excused for believing that we live in an ecologically sound world and are more or less undisturbed by our constitutive out-of-placeness in nature (Tomšič 2015). Of course, our experience paints a radically different picture. The rising levels of CO_2 and other forms of pollution, the rising global temperatures, the loss of biodiversity – the list could go on – reveal just how unsustainable our current system, structurally predicated on profit creation for its own sake, really is. "Sustainability", then, cannot be the answer. In fact, arguing for sustainability amounts to little other than arguing for capitalism. And, as contributions to this thematic issue of *Svetovi/Worlds* suggest, we are anything but at peace with our rootlessness. Indeed, if the burgeoning outdoor industry and the multitude of ways in which we seek to (re)gain that which we have purportedly lost are anything to go by, our discontent seems to be worsening. Historically, as Sanja Đurin notes in her contribution on how the Velebit mountain range, which though inhabited was once considered but a barren wasteland, came to be seen as an outdoor, "wild" playground, the romantic cultural notions, stances and sentiments that were encoded in the exuberant writing of naturalists like John Muir and Henry David Thoreau and the arcadian landscapes of painters such as Thomas Cole and Thomas Eakins in the 19th century are still very much in circulation today. After two centuries of permutations within the same capitalist system it would be unfounded to think of contemporary forms of outdoor culture – an important venue of anti-ecological thought – as somehow completely novel. However, there is one aspect today that is new, namely digital technologies and media. While there are few that would object to the novelty of digitalization, there are many that would argue that it makes little difference whether one, for example, gazes at an image of a picturesque landscape on a canvas or on a smartphone screen. As a counterargument, we should note that the modes of production, circulation, and consumption of these images are highly dissimilar. It is this novelty – AI-supported digital augmentation, algorithmic infrastructures, temporally and spatially near-complete world-wide-web connectivity – in these spheres of our relating to "nature" that we term the digital aestheticization of nature and that we have taken under our ethnographic microscope.

We conceive the digital aestheticization of nature in a constant dialectical tension between the particular experience and the (purportedly?) universal views of nature, as a multifaceted, divergent, and actively negotiated process. Hence, we find it heuristically and epistemologically productive to explore it in historically, culturally, and ecologically specific, yet in some way representative locales, where the elucidation of differences and parallels may yield insights into digital aestheticization as such. We hope that the historically and ethnographically grounded research in this issue elucidates both the shared and divergent ways in which digital media and technology transform human-nature relations, specifically their sensory, affective, discursive, and practical aspects. We focus on locations in three European countries, namely Slovenia, Croatia, and Finland, as well as offer a meta-level view from Norway. The research presented in the following pages was conducted as part of the CHANSE-founded international project Digital Aestheticization of Fragile Environments (Grant Agreement 101004509) and it focuses, much like the project at large, on the junction of some of the scholarly and socially most pressing issues: nature and, at least implicitly, environmental change, everyday life in late capitalism, and digitalization.

Opening this special issue is Senka Božić-Vrbančić's article on the aesthetic of the Instagrammable as it pertains to Telašćica Nature Park on Dugi otok Island in Croatia. As Božić-Vrbančić argues, the Instagrammable – as the name suggests, a category tightly connected with, but not limited to the social media platform Instagram – is about being caught in a loop of seeing and being seen. She argues that this loop constitutes an affective economy of visibility interconnecting technologies, bodies, and places. Ultimately, Božić-Vrbančić's "Instagrammable Destinations as 'Whatever' Destinations" shows that the Instagrammable transforms places into "sites flattened into consumable backdrops for the 'authentic' experiences of a subject entrapped within the visual field."

Dealing with much the same issues, but focusing on the YouTubable, Blaž Bajič's contribution "The YouTubable Climb: Imaginary Identities, Non-Places, and the Aesthetics of the Zany" zeros in on specific, yet in no way unusual online practices among climbers. Thematising the happenings related to various climbing spots in Slovenia and Croatia (including on Dugi otok Island), he argues that the YouTubable, as a category about action, contributes to turning identities, places, and performances into "(hy-per)versions of the self, non-places, and performances of performances", all mediated via particular imagery and algorithmic networks. Bajič's observations complement those of Božić-Vrbančić, and beyond their similar theoretical outlooks and collaboration seem to point to a truth hidden in the opaque multitudes of "content".

Taking a more historically-oriented perspective to the construction of a locality, Sanja Đurin's contribution "From Pasture-Lands to Wilderness: How Velebit Became the Ultimate Place of Wilderness and Adventure" shows how the largest mountain range in Croatia came to be understood as a place of adventure and wilderness. The author does so against the historic background of Velebit mountain, which was inhabited by herders and their families for centuries. Based on ethnographic and archival work, online content, blogs and travel literature analysis, Đurin shows how this shift in the cultural meaning of Velebit occurred, and

underscores the ways in which global discourses on wilderness and adventure intersect with local histories and practices, producing new forms of environmental and cultural fragility.

Offering a perspective from a higher latitude, Kirsi Laurén, Tiina Seppä and Juhana Venäläinen explore how digital devices shape the aesthetic perceptions and interactions with the fragile Finnish mires. Based on senso-digital walking interviews (described in more detail by Sandi Abram) in Patvinsuo and Viiankiaapa nature parks in Finland, their contribution "Capturing the Invisible: The Digital Aestheticization of Mires" carefully examines how technologies like mobile cameras, social media, and navigation apps influence how we experience mires and thus provide new ways to capture and share mire aesthetics, allowing users to multimodally engage with the ecological nuances of these environments.

Ana Svetel and Veronika Zavratnik's contribution presents their ongoing exploration in the Solčavsko region in the Kamnik-Savinja Alps in northern Slovenia. "Fragile Sustainability or Sustainable Fragility? Local Understanding of Global Terms in the Logar Valley" explores "the materialisations of sustainability in the Logar Valley," one of the main tourist spots in the region. The authors examine how the notion of sustainability is understood and practiced by the local tourism service providers. Based on ethnographic observations, they highlight four themes: food practices, the temporalities of tourism, transport, and environmental care. Svetel and Zavratnik find that for the local tourism service providers, sustainability is closely connected to ideas of tradition and fragility, forming a discursive strategy in which they position themselves in relation to the Other, situate themselves between the past and the future, nature and culture, tradition and innovation, the good and the bad.

Staying in the Logar Valley, but in his thinking drawing on sources from "wherever", Sandi Abram's "The Long Journey to Senso-Digital Walking: Exploring Fragility and Care in an Alpine Valley" explores walking as a research tool and cultural practice. Abram traces the trajectories of its intellectual and methodological development in the social sciences and humanities from the early intersections between walking and aesthetic practices in the 20th century, highlighting key debates and advances, to the contemporary "walking turn" in the humanities. Abram goes on to introduce the concept of senso-digital walks, an ethnographic method he used in the Solčavsko region to explore the understandings that emerge between sensory perceptions, environmental transformations, and digital technologies, while examining issues of care, fragility, and localism.

Returning to the north of Europe, the thematic part of the issue concludes with Gašper Raušl's interview with the environmental historian and expert in science and technology studies Finn-Arne Jørgensen. In "Perspectives on Environmental Humanities: Technology, Nature, and Human-Animal Relationships", Raušl and Jørgensen discuss some of the crucial topics dealt with in the environmental humanities, including the notion of mediation referring to the process fundamentally in-between people and the rest of the world. Moreover, they talk about the challenges faced by the field and – perhaps most importantly – by young scholars interested in advancing their work in environmental humanities.

This issue of *Svetovi/Worlds* also includes a brand-new section, *Varia,* which is dedicated to contributions that go beyond the framework of any particular thematic bloc. The

honour of being the first author featured in this section goes to Jana Rajh Plohl and her work on "Poetry Translators at Crossroads and Intersections of Cultures". Rajh Plohl deals with poetry translation, the practices and challenges of translators, analyses the concepts of translation studies and links them to the fields of cultural and linguistic anthropology. The author addresses questions concerning the role of the translator, the untranslatability of poetry, the impact of translation on language, and how translation can contribute to intercultural understanding. It is important to point out that Rajh Plohl's contribution is based on a seminar assignment from her second year of graduate studies. As such, it is truly an outstanding piece of work and we hope that it will serve as encouragement for both her and her colleagues to continue with their efforts. They do not go unnoticed.

One of the recurring themes across the contributions in this issue – implicitly even Jana Rajh Plohl's – is aestheticization. Walter Benjamin famously warned us that the aestheticization of politics will lead to dire consequences. Thus, when uttering the phrase "aestheticization of nature" or "aestheticization of ecology", especially when amplified by the proliferation of digital media, one cannot but feel a sense of unease. However, this must not preclude its critical scrutiny. As Mia Bennett (2020) observes, the dominant aesthetic categories of nature and ecology in the digital age often evoke feelings of awe, melancholy, and passivity, discouraging proactive engagement. She suggests that we look for alternative categories, categories more conductive to action, in order to shift from the aestheticization of ecology to the ecologization of aesthetics. Morton reminds us that "thinking ecologically" requires us to dismantle the existing frameworks and to imagine new possibilities for living and thinking with the non-human world. The digital, with its potential for decentralisation and disruption, presents both challenges and opportunities in this endeavour. By critically engaging with the digital aestheticization of nature, we can begin to envision new ways of relating to the fragile environments that sustain us all. Perhaps there are "hidden gems" among the plethora of vernacular aesthetics, or perhaps a translator of poetry can offer us an inspiring starting point. We would ostensibly not come any closer to the "grey nature" of science, but we would contribute to the shifting of cultural attitudes. It is here that research into the digital aestheticization of nature reveals itself to be deeply ethical and political. We may not enjoy it, but we must think it – and hopefully, this issue of *Svetovi/Worlds* can aid us in doing so.

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Uvodnik

Blaž Bajič

»Naravo« je izjemno težko opredeliti; njeni kulturni pomeni se spreminjajo skozi čas in prostor, če ta izmuzljivi pojem sploh najdemo v posamezni družbi (Soper 1995; Descola 2013). Vendar, če do skrajnosti poenostavimo, na različnih intelektualnih področjih njeno razumevanje pogosto niha med dvema poloma. Po eni strani realizem postavlja naravo kot ontološko neodvisno – področje, ki obstaja ne glede na človeško percepcijo ali kulturne konstrukte. Po drugi strani pa konstruktivizem uveljavlja naravo kot zgodovinsko, diskurzivno tvorbo, »izdelano« skozi človeške interakcije, interpretacije in ideologije (Kozorog 2015: 117, op. 1). Ta delitev pa ne pomeni, da ni »posredovanja« med »naravnimi dejstvi« in »kulturno konstrukcijo«, če uporabimo izraze, razširjene v antropologiji.

Znanstveno odkrivanje narave – ne glede na to, kako razumemo pojem »odkritja« – se vselej odvija v konkretnih družbenozgodovinskih okoliščinah. Pogoji odkritja določene znanstvene teorije pa niso enaki pogojem njene veljavnosti, saj so »ontološke trditve znanstvene teorije močnejše, v končni fazi nezdružljive z njihovo historicistično ali transcendentalno relativizacijo« (Žižek 2012: 908). Narava, zreducirana na »sive«, nesmiselne, nečloveške formule, vztraja onkraj smisla, kulturnega ali kakršnega koli drugačnega, in se ne umešča neproblematično v zgoraj omenjeno dihotomijo. Tako bi lahko rekli, da tudi če narava ne obstaja (kot realnost), vendarle vztraja (kot Realna).

Zdi se, da smo v kulturni antropologiji, kulturologiji, zgodovini, okoljskih študijih in tudi humanistiki bolj splošno priče nezadovoljstvu s prav tem vidikom narave. Francoski antropolog Philippe Descola se je v svojem zapisu o »nastanku modernega koncepta narave« (2013: 57) simptomatično osredotočil na zgodnje primere krajinskega slikarstva, torej na obliko estetizacije okolja. Seveda, ne uidejo mu matematizirajoča prizadevanja mislecev, kot sta Descartes in Kopernik, pri spoznavanju narave, toda umesti jih v isti »način predstavljanja človeškega okolja« (2013: 61) kot krajinsko slikarstvo, ki je da neločljivo povezan z vizualnimi konvencijami in tehnologijami tistega časa.

Druga stran takšnega razmišljanja bi lahko bila, da je vsak način »gledanja«, »predstavljanja« ali »odkrivanja« narave enako verodostojen. Takšno stališče pa ni samo epi-

stemično relativistično, ampak je tudi, kot je trdil Timothy Morton (2007), globoko proti-
-ekološko, saj se večina, če ne vsi drugi pojmi »narave« implicitno ali eksplicitno opirajo
na idejo o Celoti (predstavljena na primer kot Mati zemlja). Morton je poudaril, da je eko-
loško razmišljanje izrazito moderno in je postalo možno šele, ko je kapitalizem prodrl v vse
oblike življenja ter izničil vsakršno predstavo o koherentni in avtentični »naravi«. In ni
nepomembno, da se je pri tem v veliki meri opiral na vizualna, tehnološka ter konec kon-
cev znanstvena »posredovanja«, ki so porodila moderno koncepcijo narave (Descola 2013:
61–71). Trdim, da je, v dobrem in slabem, treba vztrajati pri razlikovanju med znanstvenim
konceptom narave ter množico kulturnih pojmov, ki slišijo na isto ime, vendar se nanašajo
na nekaj povsem drugega in drugačnega. Pomembna posledica tega razločka bi seveda bila,
da sta narava in njen znanstveni pojem tako tuja večini sodobnih Evropejcev, kot sta na pri-
mer pripadnikom ljudstva Achuar. Poleg tega bi se lahko vprašali, ali in v kakšnem smislu
prvi negirajo drugega – ga izključujejo, utajujejo ali potlačujejo?

V luči povedanega bi morda kdo pomislil, da – glede na kapitalistično hegemonijo
v zadnjih dveh stoletjih – živimo v ekološko neoporečnem svetu in da smo bolj ali manj
pomirjeni z našo konstitutivno neumestnostjo v »naravi« (Tomšič 2015). Izkušnja nam
seveda kaže nadvse drugačno sliko. Naraščajoče ravni CO_2 in druge oblike onesnaževanja,
globalno vedno višje temperature, izguba biotske raznovrstnosti – seznam bi se seveda
lahko nadaljeval – razkrivajo, kako nevzdržen je sedanji sistem, ki strukturno temelji na
ustvarjanju dobička zaradi dobička samega. »Trajnost« tako ne more biti odgovor. Prav-
zaprav je zagovarjanje trajnosti komaj kaj drugega kot zagovarjanje kapitalizma samega. In
kot nakazujejo prispevki v tej tematski številki *Svetov/Worlds*, smo vse prej kot pomirjeni s
svojo izkoreninjenostjo. Ob cvetoči industriji prostočasnih dejavnosti na prostem in njeni
obljubi, da (ponovno) pridobimo tisto, kar smo domnevno izgubili, se kvečjemu zdi, da se
naše nezadovoljstvo stopnjuje. Zgodovinsko gledano – kot poudarja tudi Sanja Đurin v
svojem prispevku o tem, kako je pogorje Velebita, ki je nekoč veljalo za neprijazno, čeprav
naseljeno puščo, postalo »divje« igrišče na prostem – so naturalisti, kot sta John Muir in
Henry David Thoreau, ter slikarji, kot sta Thomas Cole in Thomas Eakins, že v 19. stoletju
v svojih spisih vneto artikulirali oziroma v svoje arkadijske krajine vkodirali romantične
kulturne predstave, stališča in občutke, ki so tudi danes še kako v obtoku. Po dveh stoletjih
permutacij tovrstnih idej znotraj istega kapitalističnega sistema je zato neutemeljeno razmi-
šljati o sodobnih oblikah dejavnosti na prostem – pomembnem prizorišču prosti-ekološke
misli – kot nečem popolnoma novem. Pa vendar lahko identificiramo vidik, ki je nov, in
sicer digitalne tehnologije in mediji. Čeprav je le malo takih, ki bi nasprotovali novosti
digitalizacije, pa je veliko takih, ki menijo, da razlike med tem, ali gledamo podobo sliko-
vite krajine na platnu ali na zaslonu pametnega telefona, pravzaprav ni. Proti takšnemu
argumentu moramo opozoriti, da so načini produkcije, kroženja in potrošnje teh podob
zelo različni. Prav to novost – z umetno inteligenco podprto digitalno avgmentacijo, al-
goritemske infrastrukture, časovno in prostorsko skoraj popolno povezljivost s svetovnim
spletom – v našem odnosu do »narave« imenujemo digitalna estetizacija narave. In prav to
postavljamo pod etnografski mikroskop.

Digitalno estetizacijo narave gre razumeti v stalni dialektični napetosti med partikularno izkušnjo in (domnevno?) univerzalnimi razumevanji narave, kot večplasten, divergenten in dejaven družbeni proces; zato se zdi hevristično in epistemološko produktivno, da digitalno estetizacijo narave raziskujemo v zgodovinsko, kulturno in ekološko specifičnih, toda na neki način reprezentativnih krajih, kjer lahko pretresanje razlik in vzporednic prinese uvid v digitalno estetizacijo samo. Upamo, da bodo zgodovinsko in etnografsko utemeljene raziskave pojasnile nekatere skupne značilnosti in razlike med načini, na katere digitalni mediji ter tehnologije spreminjajo odnose med ljudmi in »naravo« v njihovih čutnih, čustvenih, diskurzivnih in praktičnih vidikih po vsej Evropi. Prispevki so osredotočeni na lokacije v treh evropskih državah, in sicer v Sloveniji, na Hrvaškem in Finskem, ponujamo pa tudi oddaljeni pogled z Norveške. Raziskave, predstavljene na naslednjih straneh, so bile izvedene v okviru mednarodnega projekta Digitalna estetizacija krhkih okolij (Sporazum o dodelitvi sredstev 101004509), ki ga financirajo CHANSE in države članice, ter se podobno kot projekt na splošno osredotočajo na stičišče nekaterih znanstvenih in družbeno najbolj perečih vprašanj: narava in vsaj implicitno okoljske spremembe, vsakdanje življenje v poznem kapitalizmu ter digitalizacija.

Tematsko številko odpira članek Senke Božić-Vrbančić o instagramabilnem, kot se nanaša na naravni park Telašćica na Dugem otoku na Hrvaškem. Kot pokaže Božić-Vrbančić, gre pri instagramabilnem – kategoriji, kot že ime pove, tesno povezani s spletno platformo Instagram, čeduti ni omejena nanjo – za zanko vzajemnega videnja. Po njenem izvajanju ta zanka tvori afektivno ekonomijo medsebojno povezanih tehnologij, teles in krajev. Konec koncev Božić-Vrbančić v prispevku »Najbolj instagramabilne destinacije kot »karkoli« destinacije« pokaže, da instagramabilno spreminja kraje v »karkoli destinacije« – »mesta, sploščena v potrošna ozadja za 'avtentične' izkušnje subjekta, ujetega v vizualno polje«.

Prispevek Blaža Bajiča »YouTubovski vzpon: imaginarna identiteta, nekraji in estetika norčavosti« se ukvarja z zelo podobnimi vprašanji, vendar se osredotoča na YouTube in na specifično, toda nikakor nenavadno spletno prakso med plezalci. S tematiziranjem dogajanja na različnih plezalnih točkah v Sloveniji in na Hrvaškem (tudi na Dugem otoku) trdi, da youtubovski kot kategorija o delovanju prispeva k spreminjanju identitet, krajev in predstav v »(hi-per)verzijo sebstva, nekraj in uprizarjanje delovanja«, vse skupaj pa je posredovano prek izbranega tipa podob in algoritemskih omrežij. Bajičeva opažanja se dobro ujemajo z opažanji Božić-Vrbančić. Ujemanje sicer lahko pripišemo zgolj temu, da izhajata iz sorodnih teoretskih izhodišč, vendar pa je treba priznati možnost, da kažeta neko resnico, skrito v nepreglednih množicah spletnih »vsebin«.

Prispevek Sanje Đurin »Od pašnikov do divjine: kako je Velebit postal ultimativni kraj divjine in pustolovščine«, upoštevajoč daljše zgodovinsko obdobje, pokaže, kako so Velebit, največje pogorje na Hrvaškem, vzpostavili kot divjino in prostor pustolovščin. In to na ozadju zgodovine, ki kaže, da je bilo pogorje Velebita stoletja naseljeno. Đurin na podlagi etnografskega in arhivskega dela, spletnih vsebin, blogov ter analize potopisne literature pokaže, kako je prišlo do tega preskoka v kulturnem pomenu Velebita, in poudari načine, na katere se globalni diskurzi o divjini in pustolovščini križajo z lokalnimi zgodovinami in praksami ter proizvajajo nove oblike okoljske in kulturne krhkosti.

Kirsi Laurén, Tiina Seppä in Juhana Venäläinen raziskujejo, kako digitalne naprave oblikujejo estetske zaznave ter interakcije s krhkimi finskimi močvirji. Njihov prispevek »Ujeti nevidno: digitalna estetizacija močvirij«, osnovan na čutno-digitalnih sprehodih (ki jih podrobneje opisuje Sandi Abram) v naravnih parkih Patvinsuo in Viiankiaapa na Finskem, proučuje, kako tehnologije, kot so mobilne kamere, družabna omrežja in aplikacije za spremljanje gibanja, vplivajo na izkušnje močvirij ter oblikujejo nove načine zajemanja in »deljenja« estetike močvirja. Ti uporabnikom in uporabnicam omogočajo multimodalni odnos z ekologijo barja.

Ana Svetel in Veronika Zavratnik v prispevku predstavljata svoje raziskave na Solčavskem v Kamniško-Savinjskih Alpah. »Krhka trajnostnost ali trajnostna krhkost? Lokalno razumevanje globalnih pojmov v Logarski dolini« pretresa »materializacije trajnosti v Logarski dolini«, eni izmed glavnih turističnih točk v regiji. Avtorici proučujeta, kako pojem trajnostnosti razumejo in prakticirajo lokalni ponudniki turističnih storitev. Na podlagi svojega etnografskega opazovanja sta odčitali štiri ključne teme, in sicer prehranjevalne prakse, časovnost turizma, transport ter skrb za okolje. Svetel in Zavratnik trdita, da je trajnost za lokalne turistične ponudnike tesno povezana s predstavami o tradiciji in krhkosti, ki tvorijo diskurzivno strategijo, s katero se domačini pozicionirajo v odnosu do Drugega, se umeščajo med preteklost in prihodnost, naravo in kulturo, tradicijo in inovativnost, med dobro in slabo.

Z naslednjim prispevkom ostajamo v Logarski dolini, in sicer nas Sandi Abram pelje na »Dolgo pot do čutno-digitalnih sprehodov« in očrta, kot pove podnaslov, »raziskovanje krhkosti in skrbi v alpski dolini«. Abram premišljuje hojo kot raziskovalno orodje in kulturno prakso. Sledi poti njenega intelektualnega in metodološkega razvoja v družboslovju in humanistiki od zgodnjih presečišč med hojo ter estetskimi praksami v 20. stoletju, poudarja ključne razprave in napredek do sodobnega »pohodniškega obrata« v humanistiki. Abram nato predstavi čutno-digitalne sprehode, etnografsko metodo, ki jo je uporabil na Solčavskem za raziskovanje pojmovanj, ki nastajajo med čutnimi zaznavami, preobrazbami okolja in digitalnimi tehnologijami, pri tem pa tematizira skrb, krhkost in lokalizem.

Če se vrnemo na sever Evrope, tematsko številko zaokroži intervju Gašperja Raušla z okoljskim zgodovinarjem in ekspertom raziskav znanosti in tehnologije (*science and technology studies;* STS) Finnom-Arnejem Jørgensenom. V prispevku »Pogledi na okoljsko humanistiko: tehnologija, narava ter odnosi med ljudmi in živalmi« Raušl in Jørgensen razpravljata o nekaterih ključnih temah, s katerimi se ukvarja okoljska humanistika, vključno s pojmom »mediacije«, ki se nanaša na vmesnost med ljudmi in preostalim svetom. Poleg tega govorita o izzivih, s katerimi se soočajo področje in – kar je morda najpomembnejše – mladi znanstveniki in znanstvenice, ki jih zanima raziskovalno delo na področju okoljske humanistike.

V tokratni številki *Svetov/Worlds* premierno predstavljamo rubriko *Varia,* posvečeno prispevkom, ki presegajo okvire posameznega tematskega bloka. Čast, da je prva avtorica v tej rubriki, je pripadla Jani Rajh Plohl. Predstavlja svoje delo »Prevajalci poezije na razpotjih in stičiščih kultur«. Rajh Plohl etnografsko raziskuje prevajanje poezije ter prakse in izzive prevajalcev in prevajalk, analizira prevodoslovne koncepte ter jih povezuje s področji kulturne in lingvistične antropologije. Avtorica se loteva vprašanj o vlogi prevajalca oziroma preva-

jalke, neprevedljivosti poezije, vplivu prevoda na jezik in o tem, kako lahko prevod prispeva k medkulturnemu razumevanju. Nujno moramo poudariti, da prispevek Rajh Plohl temelji na njeni seminarski nalogi iz drugega letnika dodiplomskega študija. Kot tak je resnično izjemno delo in – upamo – spodbuda zanjo ter njene kolege in kolegice, da nadaljujejo s svojimi prizadevanji. Ne ostanejo neopaženi.

Ena od ponavljajočih se tem v prispevkih k tej tematski številki – implicitno tudi Jane Rajh Plohl – je estetizacija. Kot je znano, je Walter Benjamin opozoril, kako hude so lahko posledice estetizacije politike. Tako ob besedni zvezi »estetizacija narave« ali »estetizacija ekologije«, še posebej, če jo vidimo v kontekstu razmaha digitalnih medijev, ne gre brez nelagodja. Toda to nam ne sme preprečiti, da bi jo kritično pretresli. Kot opaža Mia Bennett (2020), prevladujoče estetske kategorije narave in ekologije v digitalni dobi pogosto vzbujajo občutke strahospoštovanja, melanholije in pasivnosti. Zato predlaga, da poiščemo alternativne kategorije, kategorije, ki spodbujajo delovanje, da bi, drugače rečeno, prešli od estetizacije ekologije k ekologizaciji estetike. Kot opozarja Morton, »ekološko razmišljanje« zahteva, da razgradimo obstoječe okvire ter si zamislimo nove možnosti za življenje in mišljenje z nečloveškim svetom. Digitalno s svojim potencialom decentralizacije in motenja ponuja tako izzive kot priložnosti v tem prizadevanju. S kritičnim raziskovanjem digitalne estetizacije narave si lahko začnemo zamišljati nove oblike odnosa do krhkih okolij, ki nas vzdržujejo. Morda se med obilico vernakularnih estetik skrivajo »skriti dragulji« ali pa nam kak prevajalec oziroma prevajalka poezije ponudi navdihujoče izhodišče. Bržkone se sicer ne bomo približali »sivi naravi« znanosti (in to tudi ni poanta), toda morda bomo prispevali k spreminjanju kulturnih odnosov. Na tej točki se raziskave digitalne estetizacije narave razkrijejo kot globoko etične in politične. Ni nam treba uživati, toda misliti pač moramo – in to tudi s pomočjo te številke *Svetov/Worlds*.

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Instagrammable Destinations as "Whatever" Destinations

Najbolj instagramabilne destinacije kot »karkoli« destinacije

Senka Božić-Vrbančić

ABSTRACT

To be Instagrammable is to be caught in a loop of seeing and being seen – a loop that stretches across screens and through bodies, binding places like Telašćica Nature Park in Croatia to the affective economies of visibility. Drawing on Jodi Dean's concept of communicative capitalism, this paper explores how the Instagrammable aesthetic transforms destinations into "whatever destinations" – sites flattened into consumable backdrops for the "authentic" experiences of a subject entrapped within the visual field.

KEYWORDS: Instagrammable, Instagram hot spots, subjectivity, Telašćica, communicative capitalism

IZVLEČEK

Biti instagramabilen pomeni biti ujet v zanko videti in biti viden – zanko, ki se razteza čez ekrane in telesa ter povezuje kraje, kot je Naravni park Telašćica na Hrvaškem, z afektivno ekonomijo vidnosti. Članek na podlagi koncepta komunikacijskega kapitalizma, ki ga je razvila Jodi Dean, raziskuje, kako instagramabilna estetika spreminja destinacije v »karkoli destinacije« – lokacije, zreducirane na potrošna ozadja za »avtentične« izkušnje subjekta, ujetega v vizualno polje.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: instagramabilno, najbolj popularni kraji na Instagramu, subjektivnost, Telašćica, komunikacijski kapitalizem

"INSTAGRAM HOT SPOT: Indescribable beauty. A view that will take your breath away." This summer, everyone is flocking to the Interpretation and Education Center Grpašćak (in Telašćica Nature Park) on Dugi otok, where you can look out the window at the stunning cliffs and endless horizon of the open sea. Simply breathtaking and enchanting! (*Jutarnji list*, 31 August 2023)

If you're searching for the perfect Instagrammable location and want to boost your social media following with an unforgettable photo ... Telašćica Nature Park is a MUST-SEE destination and a photographer's paradise. (*Zadar Archipelago* 2023)

To be beautiful, to be present, to be everywhere, to be authentic, to be Instagrammable – this is one of the latest aesthetic fixations of our time. As an aesthetic of the present, Instagrammable means to locate oneself and capture something in a specific way to participate in a visual economy that moves through platforms, across screens, and into the eyes of those who scroll by. We live in a time when more photographs are taken every two minutes than in the entire 19th century (Mirzoeff 2016: 4). This is not important just because of numbers or mere image production; it is about the changes in ways of seeing, in what it means to see and to be seen. In this paper, I explore what it means for a place like Telašćica Nature Park to be seen as Instagrammable. What implications accompany the description of a view that "takes one's breath away"? Who is this view for, and how does its aesthetic relate to political, broader social and economic issues?

Telašćica Nature Park is situated on the island of Dugi otok (Long Island) in Croatia, a place marked by its unique biodiversity and striking beauty, recognised early on as a natural reserve. It was identified as such alongside the Kornati archipelago in 1967 under the Nature Protection Act. Over time, its status has changed – it was once part of the Kornati National Park before becoming a Nature Park itself – positioning Telašćica as not only a tourist destination but a site of national pride. It stands out among Croatia's parks, each a symbol of natural wonder that speaks to the world. Such places have always attracted tourists, their images taken and shared as a way of presenting the self, as a way of saying, "I was there" (van Dijck 2008; Siegel, Tussyadiah and Scarles 2022). But in the past, this self-presentation was confined, bound by proximity, by the presence of others, usually friends and family, shaped by the contours of bodies in a shared time and place (Siegel, Tussyadiah and Scarles 2022). Now, in the era of digital photography, smartphones, and social media, self-presentation is no longer constrained. It spills over surfaces, stretches across screens, dispersed into a networked gaze. Digital images allow people to "curate" themselves, to reshape and refine how they are seen. Travel photos, once an archive of where one has been, have now become tools for constructing an idealised self, aligning itself with the tourist spaces it captures. In this reconfiguration, images take on a performative quality, tuned to ideals that hover and circulate, to sociocultural standards that linger and settle, directing how much one should edit, how much one must embellish, to truly be "there", to be seen as having been there (Lyu 2016; Siegel, Tussyadiah and Scarles 2022). Telašćica, like so many places now marked by the Instagram gaze, has become a site for this being-seen – a place where beauty is not simply encountered but curated, shaped into an image of a self meant for consumption, reflecting a particular aesthetic.

My understanding of the aesthetic draws largely from Sianne Ngai's work on the impact of capitalism on aesthetic categories. She argues that the hypercommodified and information-saturated conditions of late capitalism are reflected in minor aesthetic categories like "cute", "zany" and "interesting" that index "the ways in which contemporary subjects work and consume" (Ngai 2012: 1). These categories appear as weak and minor, but nonetheless, they penetrate our everyday lives. In a similar way, I propose here that the Instagrammable, while seemingly a minor contemporary cultural aesthetic, indexes changes in the dynamics of 21st century capitalist production and circulation. Ngai argues that each aesthetic category is more than judgment; it "names the bond between a sensuous 'look' and a discursive evaluation […] and both sides of that relation are saturated with affect" (Ngai 2022: 24). This affective saturation generates ambivalence, manifesting as the mixed and often conflicting feelings that accompany our engagements with the Instagrammable. These feelings shape how we experience Instagram Hot Spots like Telašćica as we move through a visual landscape influenced by today's social and commercial pressures for constant visibility and instant sharing. Inspired by the works of Mark Andrejevic (2020) and Jodi Dean (2010, 2014), I consider how this pressure for constant visibility and the immediacy of sharing experiences – a moment captured, an image posted – intersects with technological shifts and how, as Dean argues, this intersection captures users of communication media in a specific kind of enjoyment, accompanied with production and surveillance, a formation which she names communicative capitalism (Dean 2010: 4).

In short, the focus on the aesthetic category of Instagrammable draws us into a loop of visibility formed by communicative capitalism; it invites us to analyse the communicative relations it entails and how it shapes our connections to others, to places, and to practices that encourage us to be present, to be everywhere, and to be seen in specific ways.

Methodologically, my research falls within the field of digital ethnography and consists of two interconnected parts. In the first part, I tracked the hashtag #Telašćica on social media, especially Instagram. I was interested in the types of photos of Telašćica that were posted, where they circulated, the comments they received, and the hashtags added to them. I contacted certain account users through Instagram and had informal conversations with them about their experiences in Telašćica, their reasons for posting specific photos, and their choice of accompanying hashtags. As Pink et al. argue, in digital ethnography, "we are often in mediated contact with participants rather than in direct presence" (2015: 3).

The second part of my research involved a kind of micro-ethnography conducted in Telašćica and on the tourist boats from Zadar to Telašćica during the peak tourist months (July and August) in 2023 and 2024. I observed visitors' behaviours, chatted with them, and spoke with boat operators and park officials. I took numerous photographs and recorded sounds and conversations. My conversations with visitors to Telašćica, shaped by chance, captured a piece of the atmosphere – a sense of how Telašćica is seen, interpreted, and made visible. These conversations hold traces of social relations – relations that emerge from the textures of contemporary life, from the ways people move through spaces, carrying with them their expectations, desires, and images of what they seek to find. What follows, then, is

less about Telašćica itself or the visitors who pass through, and more about the broader social atmosphere – an atmosphere that has made it feel natural to view Telašćica as an Instagrammable destination. Therefore, the ethnographic fragments I include here offer glimpses into this atmosphere – they cannot be generalised but can help us understand certain ways of seeing destinations as Instagrammable.

In the sections that follow, I first address issues that have surfaced with the rise of social media networks like Instagram, such as the role of marketing and the quiet operation of digital algorithms. From there, I turn to the shifting meaning of "authenticity" in relation to tourist destinations like Telašćica, where the Instagrammable aesthetic begins to settle in and shape the contours of what it means to be seen. I argue that as an aesthetic category, Instagrammable shares echoes with the aesthetic of the "picturesque". Where the picturesque once reflected economic and colonial entanglements, the Instagram aesthetic mirrors our contemporary age of communicative capitalism (Ngai 2012; Dean 2010). Under this aesthetic, Telašćica is confronted with what Jodi Dean (2010) calls a "whatever subject" – a subject whose "whatever" signals a form of communication that lacks depth, a hollow connectivity that does not seek to understand itself beyond the bounds of perpetual sharing and display. In this sense, Telašćica becomes a "whatever", an Instagrammable site for a "whatever subject" caught in a loop of visibility that obscures the very hegemonic discourses shaping its existence. The place becomes flattened, rendered into something consumable, a backdrop for a subjectivity that has been entrapped in the visual field.

SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS
AND COMMUNICATIVE CAPITALISM

The term Instagrammable first appeared in 2010 with the launch of Instagram, and it refers to places, objects, or moments that are visually striking – essentially, things seen as "worthy" of being shared and captured for others. By 2018, this term had made its way into dictionaries like Merriam-Webster and Cambridge, marking its transition from slang to mainstream language and highlighting Instagram's influence on our daily perceptions and consumer habits. While Instagram shares similarities with other social networks, it stands out for its focus on visual content, representing itself as a unique form of digital communication and connectivity.

Since their emergence in the late 1990s, social media platforms, along with communications and network technology, have transformed significantly. However, some aspects have remained constant: the interconnectedness of individuals, the freedom to participate, and expanded access to diverse information. These platforms foster friendships, enable communication across distances, and provide opportunities for creative expression, reaching millions of users. Initially, social networks emphasized their democratic potential – encouraging participation, free expression, and organising grassroots political movements. However, commercialisation soon took hold, introducing paid advertisements and targeted marketing (Hinton and Hjorth 2013: 49).

Targeted marketing on social media, enhanced by artificial intelligence (AI), collects data on user preferences. Every piece of data becomes valuable as user behaviours are monitored – what they read, search for, listen to, and where they spend their time online. Additionally, identity markers like gender, age, ethnicity, and nationality are considered, ensuring users see links and pages promoting products and information that might interest them. In this way, user attention is steered toward specific content based on digital algorithms, keeping users engaged on specific platforms and generating economic value – often without their awareness. As Andrejevic points out, these algorithms play a crucial role in determining important information. Programmed to maximise profit, they automate the collection, classification, and processing of information to the extent that it may seem they understand social media users better than the users understand themselves (Andrejevic 2020: 39). Notably, users do not need to purchase the advertised products for the system to work; what matters is that they click on a promotional post, view the information, or share their thoughts about a product or service. The more time users spend on social media and the more engaged they become, the more data these networks collect about them, which is then monetized for marketing purposes (Hill 2015: 8; Kornbluh 2023: 71). In this context, social media platforms profit continuously from their users, who become a kind of unwaged digital labour. For example, Facebook's total revenue (Meta), which has also owned Instagram since 2012, reached $134 billion in 2023 (Statista 2024).

In summary, as Dean argues, social media networks are integral to communicative capitalism, where we witness the convergence of democracy and capitalism within a networked media landscape (Dean 2010: 15–16). On the one hand, social media networks embody certain values central to democracy, such as feelings of freedom and inclusivity, providing opportunities for discussion and participation on multiple levels. On the other hand, they facilitate profit-making and accumulation through various forms of commodification, creating an environment where diverse data is effortlessly collected and used to steer users' attention in particular directions.

With the emergence of hashtags, introduced in 2007, the social media landscape changed again. A hashtag is created using the symbol # to group specific posts around particular topics, serving as a link that facilitates easy searching and browsing of related content. However, it has become much more than that: it organises users' interactions and generates new pathways for visibility. In a way, hashtags shape how users inhabit digital spaces by marking moments, events, and experiences as worthy of collective attention. As hashtags circulate, they create economies of visibility, where what is seen, shared, and recognised becomes capital. The rise of the influencer is a direct consequence of this circulation, as companies invest in those whose visibility can be leveraged, with the value of that visibility determined by the number of followers or friends. In this economy, the hashtag becomes a means of being seen, a way to accumulate recognition, always with the promise of further visibility.

Instagram, in particular, serves as a dynamic platform for the circulation of various

hashtags. It is a platform where digital marketing and user data collection converge, fundamentally reshaping users engagement with identity and experience (Caldeira, De Ridder and Van Bauwel 2020). Through AI-powered editing tools, users of Instagram can form and curate their visual identities, presenting themselves as unique and interconnected, individual yet participatory. The introduction of Instagram Stories in 2016 created a space for ephemeral self-expression (and for more traffic the platform needs for monetization). Each Story disappears after 24 hours and offers a fleeting glimpse into everyday life, allowing users to share moments that might seem trivial or private: cooking, walking the dog, singing, dancing, working out, shopping, and everything in between.[1] Hashtags function as Instagram's taxonomy, serving as a framework for these sharing acts. They gather posts that resonate with similar themes or sentiments, transforming fragments into collective experiences.[2] Users can use up to 30 hashtags in a single post, covering topics ranging from #naturepark and #sunset to #love and #serenity, and even brand-specific tags (such as the shirt worn in the photo, the phone used for the shot, or the drink being consumed). In this digital landscape, users occupy a dual role as producers and consumers (or prosumers), with hashtags encapsulating their expressions and experiences (Meraz 2017: 143–145). For Dean, blurring the distinction between the role of producer and consumer helps in sublating the particularity of experiences into "mere contributions to the circulation of content" (2010: 54). In addition, hashtags provide businesses with insights into grouped posts and data linked to their products or marketing campaigns, making it easier to reach target audiences. Prosumers receive guidance on creating "authentic content" and gain access to various photo editing and filtering apps that simplify content creation. Popular applications like VSCO, PicsArt, Lightroom, Dazz Cam, and Snapseed enhance the possibilities of image refinement and composition, transforming Instagram into a platform for highly polished visual narratives.

In 2024, Instagram expanded its capabilities by allowing users to include up to 20 photos in a single post, with the carousel feature gaining popularity. This feature enables images to flow seamlessly from one to the next, merging with text to create smooth, visually engaging storytelling. The growing demand for an impactful Instagram presence has led to the rise of specialised marketing agencies that offer strategies for maximising platform visibility – how to be seen, appear "authentic", and attract a larger audience to share, save, or even "bring new friends" to a particular profile.

> Be unique, be interesting, and never boring! […] Create captivating content; make them love what you share! […] Take breathtaking photos […]. Increase engagement and grow your following […]. Track, analyse, and optimize. Only what we can measure, we can influence! (Digital Agency Marketing 2018).

[1]
Here, experiences are not simply shared; they are curated and meticulously arranged for an audience that feels both perpetually present and fleeting. Adventure and nature – key elements of the Instagram aesthetic – dominate these moments, aligning seamlessly with the platform's appeal to companies eager to brand destinations and products (Garner 2021).
[2]
Nathan Jurgenson describes this fragmentation of everyday life as "atomizing the infinity of life" (see Kornbluh 2023: 71).

Much like the aesthetic categories examined by Ngai – such as cute, zany, and interesting – the Instagrammable pulses subtly at the edges of our cultural system while being deeply embedded in the neoliberal structure of society. According to Ngai, these categories are steeped in ambivalence. For example, when we describe something as interesting, it can quickly shift to "maybe interesting", which is just a leap away from being deemed "boring" (Jasper and Ngai 2011: 47). Similarly, the zany implies perpetual action without achieving fulfilment, blurring the lines between work and play. The judgment of something as cute may suggest an objective value, yet it reflects underlying power relations that reveal the vulnerability of what is labelled as cute, potentially leading to exploitation or a heightened desire to protect (Jasper and Ngai 2011: 47). This ambivalence – where affective experiences misalign with discursive meanings – also characterises the Instagrammable. In the same way as the notion of interesting, the Instagrammable encompasses a range of temporalities. It invites circulation and recognition, hinting at something appealing that we may not yet fully understand, thus distinguishing itself from countless other moments. The Instagrammable constantly straddles the line between intriguing and dull, novelty and the mundane. It can even embrace boredom as content, but it must frame it as captivating, presenting boredom as if it were unique or authentic. Within the realm of the Instagrammable, the concept of authenticity shifts from its traditional meaning – not something genuine or uncontrived – to a carefully crafted aesthetic presentation amid a sea of "whatever". Yet, within this vast array of "whatever", certain actions, places, and destinations gain prominence due to algorithmic rankings that favour posts with higher levels of user engagement. For some Instagram users, it becomes essential to post from these algorithmically significant locations, curating a collection of Instagrammable spots to populate their profiles. The focus shifts to conveying messages like "I was here" or "I did this", but in a manner that appears "authentic", diverging from mundane displays of everyday life. Consequently, Instagrammable activities – like a daily jog – serve to demonstrate both ordinariness and extraordinariness, capturing the "authenticity" of the experience.

But, as Lauren Berlant notes, in performing "ordinary acts and events" the most challenging aspect can be the actual ordinariness of everyday life or the inherent plainness of a place or experience. What becomes paramount is the desire to belong to an aesthetic that compels individuals to be noticed, often leading social media users to self-exploit in making their posts. However, there is no guarantee that these posts will be seen – and if they are, questions remain about who will view them and how they will be perceived (Demeyer and Berlant 2021: 100–101).

This position of uncertainty – of not knowing where the gaze comes from, when it might arrive, or whether we will be noticed at all – is what Dean identifies as a defining characteristic of communicative capitalism (Dean 2010: 105). For her, the gaze of the Other is obscured within a heterogeneous digital network, where the primary signifier structuring reality seems suspended, lacking authority to provide coordinates for our desires. In this context, "whatever" becomes the primary marker, with algorithmic calculations transforming this "whatever" into fleeting trends.

Our disclosures are surveilled, archived, remembered, in ways that exceed our ability to manage or control. On the one hand, this is the source of their immense attraction, what lures us in, what incites us to practices of revelation and display. On the other, the media that incite us to create and express, to offer our thoughts, feelings, and opinions freely, to participate (but in what?), deliver us up to others to use for purposes of their own. Because one is never sure how one is seen, one is never certain of one's place in the symbolic order. How, exactly, are we being looked at? (Dean 2010: 106)

The uncertainty of the gaze – emanating from multiple directions – diffuses responsibility and blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality. As a result, the possibility of establishing fixed symbolic meanings or stable interpretations dissolves (a decline of the symbolic). Individuals become ensnared in loops that provide immediate pleasure yet trap them in a cycle of continuous repetition, moving through a series of experiences (see also Kornbluh 2023). In this context, the pursuit of identification with a specific social position or the desire for symbolic recognition (the ego ideal) becomes elusive. Instead, it resonates more with the Lacanian concept of *objet petit a*, wherein the gaze embodies the subject's entrapment within the visual field (Dean 2010: 103).

This entrapment within the visual field and the pursuit of "whatever" are reflected in various locations designated as Instagrammable sites. These places are chosen for their visual appeal, whether through natural beauty or distinctive architectural features. They serve not only as objects to be photographed but also as stages for crafting and performing one's Instagram identity (see Matchar 2017; Siegel, Tussyadiah and Scarles 2022). While the marketing potential of such locations is often highlighted – especially within the tourism industry – the gaze directed at them remains elusive and uncertain, scattered throughout a digital network and algorithmic calculations. Stripped of their original meanings, these places compete to provide "authentic" Instagram experiences, transforming into Instagram hot spots, such as Telašćica Nature Park.

TELAŠĆICA – INSTAGRAM HOT SPOT DESTINATION

The Instagram aesthetic, particularly in relation to tourism and national parks, has roots that trace back to the origins of these parks and the concept of the "picturesque". It is not new that national parks and nature reserves, celebrated for their scenic beauty, attract visitors and evolve into sought-after tourist destinations. Emerging in the late 19th century, they were shaped by a Romantic vision of the picturesque, intertwined with the economic and imperial ambitions of the time.[3] Much like the picturesque aesthetic once reflected

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[3] The creation of parks as protected areas under state ownership is closely tied to colonial projects. It is no coincidence that parks began to emerge at a time when the concept of endless "exploratory" spatial colonial expansion was slowly shifting in the minds of Europeans and North Americans. Nature was no longer imagined as an infinite resource but as a limited one, bounded by the borders set by "civilisation". Domesticated through the discourse of protection, nature came to serve both imperial and national agendas (Gissibl, Hohller and Kupper 2012). According to Ghassan Hage, it is through this discourse of domestication that we can see the intersection of racism and environmental relations. Both are rooted in a way of being in the world that is founded on the idea of "civilisation" and capitalist exploitation, grounded in power relations built on the domination of capital (Hage 2017).

economic and colonial entanglements, today the Instagram aesthetic mirrors our contemporary age of communicative capitalism.

The picturesque emerged as an aesthetic appreciation of nature primarily among the upper and middle classes during a historical moment when the land was increasingly commodified and industrialisation was advancing rapidly. On the one hand, people flocked to cities, enduring harsh factory conditions, or laboured on vast farms. On the other, a romanticised and nostalgic image of orderly rural estates began to take hold – an image that conveniently erased the gruelling labour and poverty of the peasantry.[4] This notion of untouched nature, celebrated for its visual allure, soon became a desirable attraction for tourists, especially from the middle and upper classes. Tourism encouraged more significant traffic to these so-called "untouched" natural beauties, which were increasingly threatened by industrialisation while simultaneously relying on the mobility and wealth generated by the economic shifts that fuelled both industrialisation and poverty. As Sean Smith observes, picturesque nostalgia produces what it simultaneously consumes, "its own vanishing point, driving the scarcity of its consumable object" (2019: 283).

According to Ngai, the picturesque arose alongside the growth of the marketplace. It is a gaze that drifts "over a series of window displays", and we can say that this wandering gaze has also found its way into the realm of the Instagrammable (Penny 2017). Just as the picturesque style adhered to certain rules, crafting a whole from carefully selected parts that embodied a "natural" or "authentic" sensibility, the Instagrammable constructs a sensibility from elements that stand out against the backdrop of the ordinary. Here, authenticity hinges on a meticulously curated post that differentiates itself from a flood of other images. Where the picturesque once mirrored a market-oriented gaze shaped by tourism, the Instagrammable is aligned with neoliberal principles of profitability, commodifying everything, including the Instagram users themselves. In this way, even the act of scrolling – this gaze drifting down a digital window display – becomes significant as a tool for generating profit (Penny 2017; Lobo 2023).

Finally, we arrive at our nature park – Telašćica. How do these interwoven concepts shape the park as a specific Instagram destination? What elements make it authentic, beautiful, cute, and Instagrammable? Telašćica is prominently featured on digital platforms like *Putni Kofer*[5] and *Getbybus,* where it ranks among the top 50 Instagram locations in Croatia (Getbybus 2024). As part of Croatia's tourism portfolio, the park is marketed as a

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[4]
The aesthetics of the picturesque became popular in the 18th century, particularly in England. It referred to recognising the beauty of the landscape in its natural form, as if it "looked just like a painting", but it also required human intervention. In 1792, William Gilpin characterised the picturesque as a composition that unites various elements into a whole, with those elements being necessarily natural. However, since nature doesn't always create the best compositions, it is important to design them. Artists were advised to plan their compositions in three layers: a darkened foreground, with the middle ground and background illuminated. The picturesque marked a new structure of feeling in which nature was no longer viewed as threatening but as interesting, idealised for visual consumption (Smith 2019: 282).

[5]
"With its majestic cliffs and a salt lake nestled in the heart of the island, this marine nature park enchants visitors with its serene beauty, often described as a true slice of paradise on the Adriatic coast" (Putni kofer 2024).

must-see spot in Zadar County, a destination with undeniable Instagram appeal. In 2021, the Dutch version of the reality TV show *Survivor* was filmed there, using the park as a backdrop for various wilderness scenes (Croatiaweek 2021). That same year, it even appeared on the cover of the American travel magazine *Condé Nast Traveler*, accompanied by the tagline "Find Yourself" (Zadarski list 2021).

Telašćica was designated a nature park in 1988, when mass tourism was already reshaping the landscape. While Europe's national and nature parks began emerging after World War I, most were established in the post-World War II era.[6] In what is now Croatia, the roots of conservation date back to the 19th century, but the first official parks were created under Yugoslavia. Since the early 1950s, Yugoslavia had signed several international conventions on nature conservation. In 1957, the Yugoslav Society of Conservators was founded, and by 1965, it included a society dedicated to protecting national parks. Following the 1974 Constitution, the federal republics gained the power to establish parks within their territories; from then until 1986, Yugoslavia created 22 national parks (see Petrić 2019: 172–173). Due to its unique biodiversity and exceptional beauty, Telašćica, together with the Kornati archipelago, was declared a natural reserve in 1967 under the Nature Protection Act of that time. By 1980, it became part of Kornati National Park, managed by two separate administrations – one for Kornati and another for Telašćica. But in 1986, disagreements over governance and levels of protection led to a split, and Telašćica separated from Kornati, achieving its designation as a nature park in 1988 (Kornati n.d.).

Today, Croatia boasts eight national parks and twelve nature parks. In 1994, the Croatian Parliament passed the Nature Protection Act and from 2013, when it joined the European Union, Croatia has been committed to implementing European Union environmental legislation.[7] As the only nature park located on an island, Telašćica is unique in Croatia. Its official website describes it as home to the most beautiful natural bay in the Adriatic, featuring 25 beaches, cliffs that rise to 161 metres above sea level, and the saltwater lake Mir (Telašćica n.d.).

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[6] The first national park, Yellowstone, was established in the U.S. in 1872. Beyond its significant role in shaping national identity through the public protection of natural beauty, the idea of tourism was woven into the park's creation from the very beginning. The story often told about the park's formation, centred on its untouched natural beauty, involves a group of entrepreneurs, explorers, and journalists (the Washburn Expedition) who toured the Yellowstone region in the 1870s to gather information about its stunning geysers and fascinating canyons. One evening, around a campfire, they contemplated the potential profits, convinced that such natural beauty would attract visitors. They looked to Niagara Falls as a model – where in 1818 William Forsyth had built a covered staircase and charged visitors for walking beneath the falls, later building a hotel in 1822. After discussing how much a landowner in Yellowstone could earn, someone proposed that the area be designated for public interest, as a national park. As Frost and Hall argue, this story contains all the elements of picturesque aesthetics and the pioneering myth of nations born from settler colonies: the expropriation of Indigenous land, the clearing of wilderness, the building of infrastructure and cities, the harsh working conditions and the constant migration of labour to meet the demands of work, and finally, the idea of protecting natural beauty in the name of the state, to allow public enjoyment and recreation while also fostering a sense of national uniqueness (Frost and Hall 2009: 16–28).

[7] Telašćica is also part of the Natura 2000 network, a network of protected areas across the European Union, established to ensure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats.

Image 1: Telašćica, Dugi otok (Author: Boris Kačan).

Historically, its picturesque allure – characterised by untouched and stunning nature – has attracted visitors primarily during the summer. In line with prevailing discourses, this picturesque quality has increasingly been paired with sustainable tourism, an ecological component, especially in light of discourses surrounding the climate crisis and global warming.[8]

This entanglement of eco-protection on one side and the picturesque allure of Telašćica on the other is visible in almost every legal document and on official websites concerning

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These new discourses on sustainable and eco-tourism put pressure on Telašćica to find a way to at the same time be profitable and protect nature. In the "Visitor Management Action Plan for Telašćica Nature Park", developed as part of the 2020 project "Interpretation and Education Center Grpašćak", we see the layered contemporary realities of the park – the ways it exists as both an economic opportunity and an ecological concern. Seven restaurants operate within the park, and private accommodations offer a place to stay, signalling the economic flow into the local community, the promise of tourism as shared prosperity. However, alongside this promise lies another story: the environmental costs that remain unresolved, the harm that accumulates in the very spaces meant to be preserved. Wastewater disposal remains a pressing issue, a trace of the tensions between growth and conservation. Nautical visitors, too, are marked as potential threats – their anchoring, their waste, etc. In response to these threats, the plan calls for sustainable development, for a form of tourism that is conscious of the very space it seeks to enjoy. This dynamic reflects a broader, global trend in the neoliberalisation of parks and protected areas, where spaces of preservation are reshaped to fit the demands of eco-tourism (Gissibl, Hohler and Kupper 2012). In this way, Telašćica is becoming part of a network of landscapes that are asked to be beautiful and bountiful, sites where nature "must" perform its value, where the promise of the protection of nature and endangered species is bound to the imperative of profitability (See Ramov 2020). It is relevant to this discussion that in 2024 Telašćica Nature Park was awarded the Silver Green Destinations Award at the world's largest tourism fair, ITB in Berlin.

Croatia's national and nature parks. The platform *Parkovi Hrvatske* (run by the Ministry of Economy and Sustainable Development), for instance, presents Telašćica as a sanctuary for endangered species like the bottlenose dolphin and the peregrine falcon, yet simultaneously caters to visitors' desires for capturing scenic moments, for photo opportunities that frame Telašćica as both protected and consumable, a place to be saved and shared via social platforms.

> A place where the tallest, white Adriatic cliffs of 161 metres plunge into the blue sea. Bottlenose dolphins, the last marine mammals of the Adriatic, have chosen Telašćica as their favourite spot, gathering in pods to offer visitors an unforgettable photo opportunity. Perhaps, in the same moment, you'll catch a glimpse of the peregrine falcon taking off from the cliffs. It's impossible to capture all the beauty of our most stunning and expansive Adriatic bay. (Parkovi Hrvatske n.d.)

The picturesque allure of Telašćica, intertwined with its ecological significance, also finds expression on the park's official Instagram page (@natureparktelascica). With just 2,948 followers, the profile feels small within Instagram's vast, attention-driven landscape – almost understated. Yet this modest profile does not mean that Telašćica itself lacks Instagrammable appeal or that its presence is limited to this official page. While the official account invites visitors to share their experiences using *#natureparktelascica,* most Instagram users posting about Telašćica employ a range of other hashtags which are not related to nature parks (or eco-protection) at all. These hashtags often speak to a desire for the mutual visibility of Instagrammers, for being seen, using tags like *#instalike, #instadaily, #likeback, #followforfollowback, #likers, #instamood, #instagood, #photooftheday, #instatravel,* and *#l4likes* (like for like). In this way, Telašćica enters a broader network of visibility, where sharing is bound up with the rhythms of reciprocity and exchange, where nature's allure is woven into the economy of communicative capitalism of likes and follows.

In many Instagram photographs, Telašćica and its striking turquoise seas and steep cliffs become a mere backdrop, a setting that reflects the curated lifestyles of Instagram users, where the park's ecological significance and its endangered species are barely there, almost erased. Instead, Telašćica is transformed, absorbed into a visual economy, where Instagrammers become the objects of fascination, commodified selves who captivate for various reasons. As a result, the comments section beneath these images is not just a space for emojis and likes, but an arena for potential collaborations, where the visibility of an Instagrammer beckons opportunity. For instance, a post featuring a Polish Instagrammer swimming in the turquoise waters of Lake Mir, tagged with hashtags like *#blond* and *#love,* caught the attention of a modelling agency and businesses related to tattoos and hairstyles, leading to partnership invitations.[9]

Curious to observe the performance of visitors in Telašćica firsthand, I decided to join the journey most visitors take – a day trip by boat from Zadar or nearby towns. The

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[9] Numerous examples like this exist, with the Croatian Tourist Board frequently engaging in the comments under the hashtag *#croatiafulloflife,* seeking permission to share these user-generated images on their platforms. Given that estimates suggest that 70% of Instagram users primarily seek travel inspiration on the platform, it's unsurprising that national tourist boards maintain their business profiles and leverage user-generated content (UGC) to promote various destinations. The Instagrammability of these locations significantly boosts visitor numbers.

summer months offer various boat options, from speedy gliders to larger passenger vessels. Ante, the skipper of a speedboat that provides full-day and half-day excursions, described the interest in Telašćica as follows:

> The interest is huge; you really need to book your spot in advance. Even our private tours, which aren't exactly cheap, fill up quickly. Social media is everything to us – I honestly don't know how we'd manage without it. We get great reviews, and while some people want to hear the stories, let's be real: the pictures matter most. People are after those stunning shots of the turquoise sea, sandy beaches, or cliffs. And of course, they want to be in those photos, and that's what we help them with. Just check out our Instagram or TripAdvisor – those photos speak for themselves. People want paradise, and that's exactly what we offer. Not many are interested in hiking around the islands or learning about the history; it's mostly about snorkelling and getting those awesome pics. You know how it goes: unforgettable experiences and creating memories. We even have drones for that! They get the shots they want and can share them everywhere. It's a win-win for everyone!

In contrast to the tourist speedboats that provide various equipment for capturing great photos, including drones, some boats only offer basic transportation, perhaps lunch on board, and a few hours to explore a specific destination. As I waited in line for half an hour to buy a ticket for one of these boats, the salesperson expressed surprise when I spoke Croatian and mentioned my interest in Telašćica:

> Why are you interested in Telašćica? What are you planning to do there? There's really nothing except overpriced coffee. Everything's dirty, and who knows what kind of bacteria are in that saltwater lake. I heard just a few days ago that it gets super crowded when all the boats arrive; everyone's swimming with just their heads sticking out of the water. Seriously, don't go there – you'll just be disappointed. It's not for us; it's just for tourists, and all they care about is taking pictures, and that's about it.

During the boat ride to Telašćica, I could not help but notice that, although the boat was packed with people, only a few seemed genuinely interested in the landscape as we sailed past Ugljan and Pašman islands. Most were glued to their phones. However, as we approached Telašćica, without warning from the tour guide, everyone suddenly stood up and began taking pictures. It became clear that the tourists were using apps to track our location and identify popular photo spots, including the entrance to the bay. I noticed a similar pattern once we entered the park. Almost all the visitors from the boat headed straight for the cliffs, the most famous photo spot, paying little attention to the environment around them – except for a few who were using apps to identify plants by their photos. After ten minutes of taking selfies, they moved on to the saltwater Lake Mir, where most wanted a photo of themselves swimming in the lake's turquoise-green water. This was also where the previously mentioned photo of the Polish Instagrammer was taken. It is worth noting that most tourists had little interaction with each other; they were mainly focused on their phones, either posting just-taken photos or scrolling through their feeds.

In her book *If … Then: Algorithmic Power and Politics* (2018), Taina Bucher describes our interactions with data organised by artificial intelligence as "programmed sociality". However, it's not just sociality that is shaped by engagement with this data, it also influences

cultural experiences more broadly and lived experiences. Andrejevic (2020) refers to this shaping of lived experience as "environmentality", suggesting that algorithms directly affect behaviour within specific environments treated as programmable contexts, similar to those in virtual spaces. Here, "environment" does not refer to ecological contexts but is linked to the algorithmic calculation of living space. In this way, Telašćica becomes a programmable destination immersed in a sea of other Instagrammable locations whose sole purpose, at least on Instagram, is to enhance the authenticity of posts and bolster the reputation of Instagrammers who are likely contemplating other Instagrammable spots while still at Telašćica.

    An Instagrammer from Poland told me two days after she made her post about Telašćica: "Oh, Telašćica, great experience! I don't remember all the details now; I'd have to check my photos. Today, I'm in Austria, mountain lakes... you know". When I looked at her posts from Austria, they were remarkably similar to those from Telašćica, featuring the same hashtags that are intended solely for expanding one's follower reach, including #collectingmemories.

INSTAGRAMMABLE DESTINATIONS
AS "WHATEVER" DESTINATIONS

Programmed sociality – a way of viewing the world through the lens of Instagram aesthetics – highlights broader social changes within communicative capitalism. The case of the Polish influencer illustrates how these changes relate to the dynamics of performativity and labour. Paradoxically, this creation of a mirror of consumer desire leads to a shift in the concepts and performances of work. One might argue that social media has introduced a new working mode, fundamentally altering our understanding of "free time". In the past, free time represented a temporal division within the eight-hour workday, clearly delineating what individuals did and when for specific monetary rewards. Free time was associated with pleasure and freedom, ideally existing "outside of work". While this temporal division was problematic – critiqued by Marxist theorists in the 1960s and 1970s – the definition of freedom and quality of life remained tied to labour. Consequently, free time was often reduced to consumerist expenditures that could lead to personal debt. Additionally, unpaid work performed during "free time" (such as household chores or certain agricultural tasks) complicates this notion further.

    In today's neoliberal context, especially with the rise of the digital economy, equating free time with work has become commonplace. It is crucial to note that since the beginning of neoliberal restructuring in the economy and society, the question of freedom – and, by extension, the idea of free time – has become a focal point around which various value systems have been dismantled and restructured, as if caught in a whirlpool.[10] Wendy Brown,

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Neoliberal economic policies were first introduced in 1973 in Chile (influenced by the Chicago School of Economics), and by the early 1980s, Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan had implemented neoliberal programs in their own countries. These policies quickly spread to other nations. Depending on the local context, neoliberal economic policies promoted the privatisation of state institutions and services, the deregulation of capital and labour, the reduction of progressive taxation, the free flow of capital, and the sovereignty of the individual (the rational decision-making subject) (Brown 2019: 18; see also: Božić-Vrbančić 2023).

in her book *In the Ruins of Neoliberalism* (2019), argues that neoliberalism encompasses more than mere economic restructuring; it embodies a political rationality that promotes individual freedom as independence from both the state and one another. Brown emphasizes that this conception of freedom legitimises self-exploitation and increasing economic inequality, failing to interrogate the material conditions in which individuals find themselves. Instead, the freedom of the market establishes the "rules of the game" within which individual freedoms are exercised. According to Brown, neoliberalism simultaneously produces and consumes freedom in the pursuit of unrestricted economic progress, viewing the entire planet as its horizon. This leads to a form of commercial planetaryization that creates conditions for freedom – the idea that "you are free to be free". In other words, it establishes circumstances under which individuals feel free and engage in practices of self-care and self-investment across multiple levels – both financial and socio-cultural (Božić Vrbančić 2023: 41–44; see also Foucault 2016).

When considering technological advancements, the emergence of artificial intelligence, and communication through social media, the complexities surrounding freedom, free time, and labour experiences deepen. Engaging with various entertainment content on platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube during leisure moments algorithmically transforms into calculations regarding potential economic value creation. Surfing, scrolling, and sharing thoughts with followers effectively become forms of labour-sharing – ranging from creative and social to emotional and affective labour.

The question arises: is Telaščica, or any other Instagrammable destination, genuinely accessible, considering all that has been discussed? Matthew Flisfeder (2021) views activities on social media as forms of self-curation and self-branding. In this context, an Instagram profile serves as an exhibition space where users create a specific reputation by sharing Instagrammable photos from various locations. Users seek posts they can trust, primarily interested in genuine experiences of places, food, clothing, and other elements. Even though they recognise that shared photos are often filtered and edited, this awareness does not diminish their desire to discover something authentic or interesting in each moment, as they hope to showcase their own Instagrammable experiences.

In this dynamic, the destination itself becomes secondary to the Instagrammer, who primarily utilises the location to expand their social connections and enhance their visibility. Jodi Dean, in her theorisation of participatory culture, authenticity, and the expansion of friendships on social media, notes that connections formed on these platforms, particularly with individuals outside one's immediate circle, resemble Slavoj Žižek's concept of "decaf coffee" – friendships devoid of real intimacy or, as Dean puts it, "friendships without friendship" (2010: 73). According to Žižek, the notion that we can consume anything, regardless of its potential detriment to our well-being, as long as we can remove the negative aspects, is a characteristic of contemporary consumerism (for instance, decaf coffee allows us to enjoy the idea of drinking coffee without the harmful effects) (Žižek 2003).

Instagram operates similarly, providing an experience of reality stripped of certain limiting components. Daily life is fragmented into moments that must primarily be aestheti-

cally pleasing. This dissection of daily activities into interesting details creates an illusion of freedom in both expression and content consumption. However, in this process, we risk losing our grounding in reality, leading to a questioning of meaning that diminishes the stability traditionally offered by symbolic frameworks (reflecting the inefficacy of the symbolic). Consequently, affective and visual elements gain increasing significance in our engagements (Dean 2010: 21–22).

Posting photos of daily activities, travels, adventures, mishaps, and nature excursions – along with following what others do – fosters a sense of connection ("I am not alone") without the burden of accountability. Users can easily disconnect from a profile or stop following specific accounts at any moment. Most importantly, this dynamic generates feelings of pleasure and a sense of living. For Dean, this relationship to pleasure is linked to the concept of drive.

Drawing on Lacanian psychoanalysis, Dean posits that desire and drive are two key concepts that shape how individuals experience and seek pleasure. Desire can never be fully satisfied; it is directed not only at desired objects but also at the very processes of desiring. In contrast, drive is not focused on a specific object; rather, it returns like a boomerang, finding pleasure in the ongoing process of repetition. This repetition brings satisfaction, regardless of whether we have diverged from the original desired object. In the continuous cycle of posting, scrolling, searching, commenting, and liking, Dean identifies a clear connection to drive: just one more post, just one more click, just one more look to see what is trending today, what's receiving the most views, or what has garnered the most likes (Dean 2010: 109).

When examining the interplay between drive and desire within the framework of new digital technologies, we must confront the provocative question: is Telaščica, or any tourist destination for that matter, genuinely accessible? Are we truly capable of reaching a definitive endpoint, attaining ultimate pleasure, or completely consuming nature as repackaged through the lens of Instagram aesthetics? Or is it rather a case of relentless repetition – an endless cycle of seemingly distinct experiences and pathways that ultimately lead us nowhere?

This is where Dean's analysis of communicative capitalism becomes crucial. According to her, this capitalist paradigm hinges on repetition. Instagram, as a digital communication platform, facilitates this very repetition where pleasure morphs into something far more insidious: it becomes an object of loss rather than simply a lost object of desire. We find ourselves ensnared in a cycle of incessant sharing and competitive display, where our desires are not merely blocked but proliferate into fragmented drives, creating knots of anxiety that vanish in the labyrinth of interconnectedness.

What is particularly alarming is Dean's assertion that this new "community" – if we dare label it as such – constructs identities increasingly detached from traditional markers like ethnicity, nationality, gender, or age. Instead, we are confronted with a "whatever subject", where this "whatever" signifies a hollow form of communication devoid of any substantive interest in understanding itself outside the confines of perpetual connectivity (Dean 2010: 89). In this way, Telaščica transforms into a mere "whatever", an Instagrammable site for a "whatever subject" that loses the ability to perceive the hegemonic discourses

shaping its very existence. This absence of critical engagement eliminates any potential for questioning; irony fades away, leaving various locales to function solely as props for virtual lifestyles and identities that have become commodified.

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POVZETEK

Članek na podlagi manjšinske estetike Sianne Ngai in koncepta komunikacijskega kapitalizma Jodi Dean proučuje instagramabilno kot sodobno estetsko kategorijo. Na primeru Naravnega parka Telašćica raziskuje, kako se instagramabilne destinacije preoblikujejo v »karkoli destinacije«, zreducirane na potrošne kulise za samokuracijo ter digitalno vidnost. V prvem delu naslavlja ključna vprašanja, ki se porajajo z vzponom platform družbenih omrežij, vključno z vlogo trženja in nevidnim delovanjem digitalnih algoritmov. V nadaljevanju raziskuje spreminjajoči se pomen »avtentičnosti« turističnih destinacij, kakršna je tudi Telašćica, kjer instagramabilna estetika preoblikuje način, kako so prostori videni in doživeti. Prispevek zagovarja trditev, da instagramabilnost, tako kot slikovitost, odseva globlje socioekonomske dinamike. Medtem ko je bila slikovitost tesno povezana s kolonialnimi in gospodarskimi razmerami, se v estetiki Instagrama zrcalijo poblagovljene strukture komunikacijskega kapitalizma. V tem okviru Telašćica postane tisto, kar Dean opisuje kot mesto »karkoli subjekta« – subjekta, ujetega v površinske, ponavljajoče se cikle deljenja in prikazovanja. Ta zanka vidnosti prostor potepta in ga spremeni v potrošen predmet, v »karkoli prostor« za »karkoli subjekt«, ujet v vidno polje.

The YouTubable Climb:
Imaginary Identities, Non-Places,
and the Aesthetics of the Zany

Blaž Bajič

ABSTRACT

The article examines how social media, particularly YouTube, frame the representation of identity, place, and performance. Social media, with their reliance on algorithmic infrastructures, transform these representations into (hy-per)versions of the self, non-places, and performances of performances. The very fact of being produced, circulated and consumed via social media places them in the broader context of late capitalism.

KEYWORDS: YouTube, social media, climbing, digital aestheticization, outdoor adventure sports, nature

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek proučuje, kako družbeni mediji, zlasti YouTube, uokvirjajo predstavitev identitete, kraja in nastopanja. Družbeni mediji, ki se zanašajo na algoritemske infrastrukture, jih spreminjajo v (hi-per)verzije jaza, nekrajev in izvajanje izvajanja. Že samo dejstvo, da so proizvedeni, spravljeni v obtok in konzumirani prek družbenih medijev, jih veže na širši kontekst poznega kapitalizma.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: YouTube, družbeni mediji, plezanje, digitalna estetizacija, adrenalinski športi, narava

TO SET THE SCENE

A muscular long-haired man is dangling by his fingertips on a steeply overhanging rock face high above dark turquoise water. No protection, except the water some 20 metres below. His face suggests that he is struggling to hang on and the fingers of his right hand appear to be bleeding. How did he manage to get himself into this situation? Will he manage to finish the climb? What if he falls?

Photo 1: Chris Sharma during his first ascent of Es Pontás (Reel Rock, 2021)

     This is the thumbnail of a video posted on the online video sharing platform YouTube, of the American climber Chris Sharma's first ascent of the Es Pontás route on the eponymous rock formation off the coast of Mallorca, and the questions that might impose themselves upon the viewer. One can hardly resist clicking on the thumbnail and watching the footage.

     In the first minute of the footage of "[o]ne of the most beautiful and outrageous rock climbs ever filmed" (Reel Rock 2021), Sharma climbs calmly, gripping and stepping on barely existent hand- and footholds, while the waves pound the base of the stone arch. He soon positions himself into a stance reminiscent of a sprinter's starting posture. Suddenly, Sharma lunges more than two metres upwards, attempting – but ultimately failing – to grab a fissure in the rock face. The attempt ends with Sharma falling back first into the roaring sea. It took Sharma, arguably the best rock climber in the world in 2006, more than 50 attempts to finally complete "the ultimate 'King Line'" (Reel Rock 2021).

     The footage of Sharma attempting the Es Pontás *deep-water solo* route paradigmatically embodies what is colloquially known as "YouTubable".[1] The most popular definition of YouTubable on Urban Dictionary, a crowdsourced online dictionary defining slang words, phrases, and contemporary terms, often with humorous or informal explanations, describes the term as "an action that is so remarkable or spectacular, that it's worthy of being filmed and posted on YouTube," adding that the term "applies especially to a sport move" (Urban Dictionary 2011). Even a cursory review of sporting situa-

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[1]
Deep-water solo, or DWS, is a style of free climbing where the climber moves over the rock without any aid or protective equipment other than the water below.

tions on the video-sharing platform suggests that many YouTubable actions – the footage of Sharma's climb being a case in point – take place in what is conventionally termed nature. Moreover, it is not unusual that the locations where these actions take place are themselves perceived as YouTubable – the Es Pontás stone-arch, too, being exemplary.

Amongst a multitude of climbers and other practitioners of "adventure sports" (Breivik 2010) who present their activities online, I have chosen the example of Chris Sharma to introduce this article for two principal reasons. First, as far as climbing goes, he has been among the most important popularisers of the sport in the last twenty or so years, and his sharing of carefully curated content online has been paradigmatic by being one of the first professional climbers with his own channel on YouTube.[2] Second, he has outspokenly advocated for a more "harmonious" relationship with nature, claiming that adventure sports engender a personal connection to nature and thus an opportunity for personal growth, and utilising his (social) media activities and exposure to promote these values. In this article, however, I am not concerned with climbing "rock stars" *per se,* nor with any other social media adventure sports influencer whose work might generate tens or even hundreds of thousands of views, where comparatively substantial investments and profits are made. My interest lies with the much more modest, yet structurally comparable social media engagement of climbing "content makers" (cf. Bajič 2024: 54, fn. 8). More specifically, my focus is on the category of the YouTubable and its possible, indeed preferred constituents, and ways of representing them, namely identity, place, and performance, and how outdoor adventure content creators deal with them. I argue that the very fact that they are re-imagined and de-centred via social media, combining imagery and algorithmic infrastructures, fundamentally reshapes their character, converting them into a specific (hy-per)version of one's identity (Božič Vrbančić 2025; Kozorog 2024), de-territorialising them as non-places (Augé 1995; Dickinson 2011) and infusing the performance with zany aesthetics (Ngai 2012).

In what follows, I thematise these "ingredients" of digital aestheticization in/of the outdoors as it appears on YouTube, and elaborate on three climbing content creators' reflections of their practice. I conclude by considering some of the ramifications of the You-Tubable. Through these successive sections, I will attempt to address the question of how climbing content creators, by climbing and by representing climbing, create their identities and their (non-)places. First, however, allow me to briefly describe how I came to be interested in the topic and how I addressed the subject ethnographically.

2

An important caveat: like other professional climbers, Sharma is often backed up by professional production teams rather than relying on his own know-how and, moreover, is nearly exclusively focused on his "outdoor projects". In the last five or so years, a trend of "climbing youtubers" who produce all of their content either themselves or with a group of friends has emerged. However, many concentrate on indoor gym climbing and would themselves most probably emphasize other climbers as crucial trendsetters. A select few have become so successful that content creation has become their fulltime occupation, while others utilise it to promote their other business ventures (coaching, gyms, climbing equipment, outdoor tours, etc.), and professional athletes align with the trend to promote their sponsors and their achievements. The majority, however, use online social platforms simply to "share their passion with the climbing community", as the popular phrasing goes. According to some practitioners of the sport, the worlds of outdoor and indoor climbing are drifting further and further apart (Camoletto and Marcelli 2020). While there is some truth to this claim, there is, at least online, also considerable overlap and fluidity in "the community" (with some also venturing into more general lifestyle and fitness territory).

BETWEEN A ROCK FACE AND A COMPUTER SCREEN:
A SHORT (AUTO)ETHNOGRAPHIC NOTE

As I wanted to capture the process of creation of the YouTubable as it unfolds in outdoor adventure sports, it was important to move betwixt and between nature and (online) culture. Thus, I attempted to conduct what Liz Przybylski (2020) terms hybrid ethnography. According to Przybylski, fieldwork in a post-digital world (Berry 2014) "requires a conceptual shift in ethnography" (Przybylski 2020: 4). While I appreciate her argument, I am not entirely convinced that she managed to adequately pin-point the shift, as the notion that as we – as do our interlocutors – traverse and are simultaneously positioned in multiple social roles and spatio-temporal frameworks is hardly new, or necessarily related to questions of our online and offline worlds. Furthermore, she emphasizes that researching "digital-physical space require[s] more than an additive methodology" (Przybylski 2020: 6). While I am, again, supportive of her argument, it is not entirely clear in what way hybrid ethnography diverges from "an additive methodology".

Perhaps one possible solution is, firstly, to take the notion of a hybrid field seriously, that is, conceive it as a life-world, notwithstanding our interlocutors' claims about the gap between the online and the offline and their actual practice of integrating the two. After all, as Malinowski already claimed, "[social] reality [is] located somewhere in the gap between ideal and real, between what people say they do and what they actually do" (Baker 1987: 21). Now, I by no means mean to align these two distinctions or to imply that the offline is real while the online is not. The online is, if anything, "more real" than the offline, since it is there that our fantasies play out most intensely today (Žižek 2006). What I do mean to argue is that we need to truly accept that, to quote David M. Berry, we have entered a (new kind of) world, where the online (and the digital more broadly) is "completely bound up with and constitutive of everyday life" (Berry 2014: 3; see also Zavratnik in Svetel 2021). So, rather than a hybrid world or field, we need to acknowledge that we are dealing with a full-blooded world. Secondly, without denying the need for further methodological experimentation, perhaps the way forward is to go backwards, to add by subtracting. The core of ethnography, as Przybylski herself acknowledges, remains unchanged, namely "patient observation of and participation in interactions" (Przybylski 2020: 7). Moreover, ethnography has always encompassed – and added into its rather heterodox mix – various techniques, whose results are sometimes contradictory, as is social reality itself. Recognising a "new", full-blooded world and a core of ethnography should, however, by no means be understood as an attempt at totalisation or an "integration" of diverse forms of "data". On the contrary, it should be seen, as I hope to show below, as an endeavour to point out the gaps from within it corresponding to the gaps in the social reality.

How, then, did I, in a more practical sense, conduct my conventional ethnography? Between June 2023 and September 2024, I conducted eight semi-structured interviews and six ethnographic "walks" almost exclusively with people with a vested interest in digital aestheticization, e.g. online content creators, or influencers, people employed in outdoor

adventure tourism, and also had, whilst climbing and hiking, countless informal conversations with more casual prosumers of online content. A significant number of these activities took place in the Alpine regions of Solčavsko, Bohinj, and Pokljuka in Slovenia, as well as on Croatia's Dugi otok island and in Paklenica gorge, the country's "climbing Mecca". Paradoxically, however, the locations as such turned out to be rather irrelevant. Despite the often-emphasized *genius loci* of these places (or virtually any other place one might gaze upon on "climbing YouTube", such as Vranjača Cave described below), the depiction on social media, as I argue below, not only reduced them to a setting for content creators to "be there" and present a curated image of themselves (Lobo 2023: 6), but displaced or de-territorialised them into non-places (Augé 1995; Dickinson 2011). For example, ethnographic "walks" (I put the word "walks" in quotation marks as they encompassed, in addition to actual walking, scrambling, climbing, rappelling, standing around and sitting), a method with which I aimed to, by moving in a specific environment with others, observe and engage with the embodied and placial cultural dynamics (see Abram 2025), showed this perfectly, as the activities were at the same time also disembodied and displaced across virtual networks through the frequent use of digital media and technologies. The "walks" were thus a research method and a platform, constituting or enacting "hybrid" fields.

It is important to note that, in a post-digital world, the distinction between one's role as a producer and a consumer is collapsing as one's online engagement tends to contribute to the circulation of content via "invisible" networks and labour for the enterprises steering them (Dean 2010: 54). By promoting certain aesthetics, these networks shape prosumers' perceptions, tastes, and sensibilities, which they in turn continue to reproduce in their own digital aesthetization. It was crucial for me to regularly and systematically experience the workings of these networks as much as possible, sometimes by following and sometimes by contributing to the relevant hashtag markers, profiles, and platforms on social networks, as well as on more specialised websites, many of which include at least some aspects of social networks (posting comments, photos, videos, polling, etc.), such as 8a.nu. Related to my positioning within these networks, their effects (and affects) and the prosumers there, I must, in the spirit of autoethnography, emphasize that mountaineering has in various ways been a part of my childhood and, especially in tandem with sport climbing, a part of my leisure time especially in the last five years. While my personal history has undoubtedly contributed to certain oversights, it has also enabled me to more easily "sync" with my interlocutors and detect shifts in "structures of feeling" (Williams 1983) both online and offline.[3]

Before discussing how, located betwixt and between the online and the offline world, climbing content creators understand what is worth showing, I want to outline what I mean by digital aestheticization, both to better situate my interlocutors' practice as well as my own exploration of its implications.

3
In public discourse in Slovenia, these shifts, reflected in the move from the "traditional" alpine culture of Sloveneness (see Šaver 2005) to a new, middle-class-oriented lifestyle and its preoccupation with self-presentation in the gaze of others, are often linked to social media (Bajič and Repič 2024). These shifts have caused veritable moral panic and protests among the self--appointed gatekeepers of "authentic" mountaineering.

How, then, should the digital aestheticization of nature be understood? What is its cultural and social "place"? Furthermore, what, if anything, should "nature" on the screen of a mobile phone or a computer mean? The aestheticization of nature is neither a new phenomenon (in fact, as Descola (2018: 99–107) pointed out, it contributed to the constitution of the very idea of nature) nor is there anything novel in the fact that this process occurs through media. For example, landscape painting has been prominent since at least the Romantic period, and the advent of mass reproduction technologies enabled the mass distribution of landscape imagery (e.g. with postcards) in the late 19th and early 20th century (Löfgren 1999). Affordable technologies later ostensibly democratised the process (Grebowicz 2015: 8–9). While digital aestheticization of nature retains all of these aspects, it is re-defined by three key factors, namely its embeddedness in algorithmic and/or AI structures, its integration into late capitalism, and its occurrence amid a growing awareness of environmental fragility (Dominguez Rubio 2023). Here, I will limit my discussion to the first two.

Social media are not neutral repositories of images. Writing about YouTube, Michael Strangelove argued that "it is an intense emotional experience", "a social space" and a "virtual community [that] reflects the cultural politics of the present times" (Strangelove 2010: 4). Much has changed since social media began in the early 2000s, however. In only a few short years, algorithms became more sophisticated and central to the functioning of social media platforms. Curating feeds – promoting content and advancing commercial posts, insofar as the distinction can even be made – based on user browsing history and interconnections, algorithms ensure that users see what they want to see (even if the users might not realise it), whilst staying invisible themselves. As Mark Andrejevic (in Božić-Vrbančić 2025) notes, optimised for profit, algorithms often know users better than they know themselves. Thus, algorithms regulate – simultaneously produce and consume – interests. By relying on images rather than language, that is, on the Imaginary rather than the Symbolic, social media reduce desire to demand (Fink 1995) and create a kind of a closed, "psychotic" world of mimesis. Immersed in it, users can only experience immediate satisfaction and rehash it again and again (Božić-Vrbančić 2025). For instance, once one begins showing an interest in climbing or other outdoor adventure activities, one's YouTube feed will soon be inundated with climbing content – from videos of top practitioners scaling the most laborious routes to "crews" goofing around at their local gyms, from trainers presenting the latest training regimen to athletes discussing their favourite pieces of equipment, and lastly, videos combining all of these – and then some.

Regulated as it might be by algorithmic infrastructures, how precisely is social media imagery connected to late capitalism and how does it affect its prosumers? According to the cultural theorist Sianne Ngai (2012), diverse aesthetics are always connected with specific socio-cultural conditions. Ngai identifies three "minor" aesthetics as being emblematic of late capitalism: the cute, the interesting and – particularly relevant for the present argument – the zany. They index consumption, circulation, and production, respectively, which are themselves taking place via digital media and technologies. These, like any aesthetic, are double-sided enti-

ties connecting perception and discourse. Each of the two sides is "saturated with affect [...] that connects them into a single spontaneous experience" (Ngai: 2022: n.p.). In short, aesthetics – shaped by the socio-cultural conditions of their emergence as "sensuous, affective reflections of the ways in which contemporary subjects work, exchange, and consume" (Ngai 2012: 1) – frame how we relate to and experience the world, including what we commonly call "nature" (Carruth and Marzec 2014: 207), as well as our understanding of ourselves and others. Something similar, I suggest, goes for the category colloquially known as the YouTubable. While not limited to social media, digital aestheticization, in short, stands for the algorithmically-decentred yet "personalised" process of producing, circulating and consuming (through) specific aesthetics, thus shaping perceptions, tastes, and sensibilities, while effectively suppressing expressions that depart from the established, commercially successful forms (Lobo 2023: 7).

How, then, does nature fit into the picture? According to Mia Bennett (2020), there is a world of difference between relating to an environment, for example, as "picturesque" rather than as "beautiful" (or perhaps as "YouTubable"?). There are implicit politics of aesthetics that social media either advance or impede (both, generally, to sustain profit maximisation) (Grebowicz 2014). As indicated above, social media content dealing with climbing and other outdoor adventure activities often presents these practices as done "in nature"[4] and thus, intentionally or not, constructs a particular (imagery of) nature.[5] While there are perhaps small differences (and getting smaller)[6] between the various platforms, with one

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[4] "Nature" is notoriously hard to define, and its cultural meanings change through time and space, if the notion is to be found at all (Descola 2018; Soper 1995). For the purposes of this paper, I want to note, following Miha Kozorog (2015), that in contexts of everyday life and outdoor adventure activities in particular, the question of (defining) nature is rarely raised. If anything, debates focus on its – more or less gradual – frontiers, while nature as such is presumed to exist. Hence, a heuristic and an ethnographic point need to be made. Firstly, as nature is culturally associated with specific environments out of doors, e.g. sea cliffs or mountains, it would be more appropriate to talk about more or less autogenic environments (Kozorog 2015: 117, fn. 1). However, since in "outdoor discourse" nature functions as a master signifier, I have decided to appropriate this emic notion. Secondly, because nature is taken to exist (to have it laws, to constitute an order, to always win, etc.), curative and normative dimensions are often assumed, providing an antithesis to the monotony of everyday urban life; moreover, nature comes to ensure ontological certainty, a balance established beyond and despite human hubris.

[5] Similar processes of curated portrayals, of course, took place apropos outdoor adventure activities long before the advent of social media. At the expense of getting ahead of myself, the production of (images of) nature in its different guises included the construction of both those venturing and living "there" (see Bajič 2014; Cronon 1995; Grebowicz 2015, 2021; Istenič and Kozorog 2014; Kozorog 2015; Ortner 1999; Vivanco and Gordon 2006). However, despite the similar, or at times arguably the same images of self and the other, I would claim that earlier forms of the outdoor production of nature implied a different subject position. (Božić-Vrbančić 2025)

[6] An important reason for diminishing social media diversity is, of course, growing oligopolistic control, with large tech corporations, such as Alphabet and Meta, owning and controlling the most influential and popular platforms, spanning and integrating social media, search engines, e-commerce, cloud computing, advertising, and more. The more "subcultural" corners of the online universe are not immune to this process. A case in point is the example of the 8a.nu platform. It began in 1999 as a local sports climbing site for the Gothenborg area. Aiming to develop a system that would make climbing measurable, incorporating scoring, comparison and ranking, it then grew to become the largest climbing database, now incorporating forums, image and video sharing capabilities, location tagging and sharing, training-logs and the like. In 2017, the site was acquired by Vertical Life Inc., "the world's largest platform for climbing with the goal of connecting all participants within the community. VL's services include an application for climbers, the Smart Climbing Gym concept for gym and route setting management, the Smart Scorecard competition scoring service, and Smart Quickdraw for ascent tracking" (Vertical Life 2024). Since then, 8a.nu has been promoting more commercial content than ever before, including a subscription-only "premium" version of the app.

designed primarily for stills, another for moving pictures, and with slightly different ways of connecting with other users, distinct algorithms and modes for catering content, etc., they all have their fundamental operation (besides profit maximisation) in common. They enable their users to share their "experiences" with others and, by presenting oneself whilst engaging in a distinct practice, also presenting distinct environments as specific landscapes. On its own, the environment "is an indeterminate object; it almost always contains enough diversity to allow the eye a great liberty in selecting, emphasizing, and grouping its elements, and it is furthermore rich in suggestion and in vague emotional stimulus. A landscape to be seen has to be composed" (Santayana in Lobo 2023: 4). It is composed, of course, via a process of technological and aesthetic mediation. By affording users precisely such mediation, social media help to reimagine both oneself as a specific personality (e.g. to construct one's self as adventurous, bold, determined, "crazy" or remarkably physically fit) and environments as specific landscapes (e.g. as "adventurescapes", as places "offering something beyond the routine of everyday life; that is, adventure" (Poljak Istenič and Kozorog 2014: 40)). In short, they enable "identity adventures" (Urbain in Poljak Istenič and Kozorog 2014: 41) both online, offline, and in-between, as Liz Przybylski (2020) would put it.

There is, in principle, a myriad of identities, practices and landscapes one can associate with and (co-)produce – or is merely choose? – through social media. We need to bear in mind that the notion of adventure, much like the aesthetization of nature, has a long and varied history, including exploration (and conquest), naturalism, travel writing, and the tourism industry (Beams, Mackie and Atencio 2019; Breivik 2010; Grebowicz 2015; Wheaton 2013). In their contemporary, late-modern form, adventure activities began in the late 1960s, mostly originating from the USA, and were brought to Europe by American entrepreneurs (Bourdieu 1984: 220–223). While they initially developed out of the countercultural movements to whose "spirit" they still refer, claiming authenticity and originality, they now primarily present a venue for consumerist, (white) middle-class reflective construction and representation of selves and landscapes (Wheaton 2013). Moreover, with its move onto social media, this venue is becoming increasingly dependent on, and subjected to, the vagaries of algorithmic infrastructures that, as suggested, discourage cultural forms deviating from the established, commercially successful designs. For this reason, the majority of content creators, commercially oriented or not, conscientiously (and oft-times unwittingly) follow the same thematic, directorial, visual, narrative, and affective tropes when creating and presenting images of themselves, places, and their actions. In other words, I am suggesting that social media, YouTube being exemplary, encourage a specific performance of performance. This "second order" performance infuses sporting performances with a particular aesthetic, namely one of zaniness. Following Ngai, this "aesthetic of action" is "[i]ntensely affective and physical," to the point that even the most strenuous, indeed dangerous activities appear amusing or "crazy" (2012: 182). It introduces an aura of fun to hard work, thus indexing broader transformations in our cultural relation to production (Ngai 2012: 181–184). In short, with zany aesthetics, not only is outdoor adventure sporting performance remade as entertainment, it has come to accommodate the cultural notion that "gain and pain" inextricably go together.

Building on the reflections of the previous section, the following subsections focus on the three key components of the YouTubable – identity, place (or nature), and performance. I continue by ethnographically exploring how climbing content creators navigate the ambiguities and incongruities that arise as these themes intertwine within the realm of social media.

Identity on the rocks

Clicking on any of the videos posted on Aljaž Žnidaršič's YouTube profile, one is instantly struck with a slew of fast cuts (and energetic rock music): two climbers traversing a snowy ridge high above the clouds, a point-of-view shot of someone crossing a sharp rocky crest on the edge of a precipice, an alpinist struggling up a steep snowy slope, and finally, another point-of-view shot of a person toasting with a drink and gesticulating towards Aljaž Tower,[7] as if to say: "I am at the top!" Five seconds in, thanks to the scrolling captions, one also learns that "your expedition is your story". Expedition Story is, as the emerging logo leads the viewer to believe, Žnidaršič's business and/or online "avatar". Indeed, as the professional videographer, photographer and alpinist-in-training has confirmed, his YouTube channel as well as his Instagram profile serve one purpose: self-promotion. In his case, self-promotion has to be understood in two inextricably linked senses: promotion of his services (performances?) and promotion of his self. On Expedition Story's webpage, in addition to his portfolio, there is also a self-presentation of Žnidaršič: "My primary motivation is to live a full life, rich with stories to tell. My love for nature drives me to spend as much time outdoors as possible [...]. Nature fills me with energy and inspiration, which is reflected in my work" (Expedition Story 2024). He goes on to emphasize that he most admires "nature and people who strive for progress and personal or professional growth". In his free time, too, he engages "in activities such as mountaineering, hiking, guiding, diving, and sailing. These activities further connect me with nature and strengthen my creative spirit" (Expedition Story 2024). It appears, then, that nature and activities of personal and professional growth somehow correlate.

During one of our conversations, he attributed his personal and professional activities to his upbringing, as his parents would take him into the mountains and encourage him to climb. Much of Žnidaršič's self-presentation is already reflected in the intro of any of his YouTube videos – which in itself poses the question of the (disappearing) boundaries between labour and leisure (see below). In any case, his videos typically feature shots of waking up early, driving through harsh conditions to reach the start of the tour, the gruelling approach, goofing around with his companions, point-of-view cap-

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[7] Aljaž Tower (Slovenian: Aljažev stolp) is a tower-shaped storm shelter and triangulation point located at the summit of Mount Triglav. Constructed in 1895 by Jakob Aljaž, a priest from Dovje, the tower serves as a significant national symbol of Slovenian identity and is closely associated with Mount Triglav as a landmark of Slovenia. Currently, the tower is state-owned, maintained by the Ljubljana Matica Alpine Club, and situated on land owned by the Municipality of Bohinj.

tures of the "action" – like negotiating a perilous rock face or scaling an ice-covered peak – interspersed with more introspective confessionals and meditative moments.[8] Then, amid the frantic and risky activities, a picturesque view of the landscape suddenly appears or there is a cinematic drone shot gliding above the couloirs and the crags.
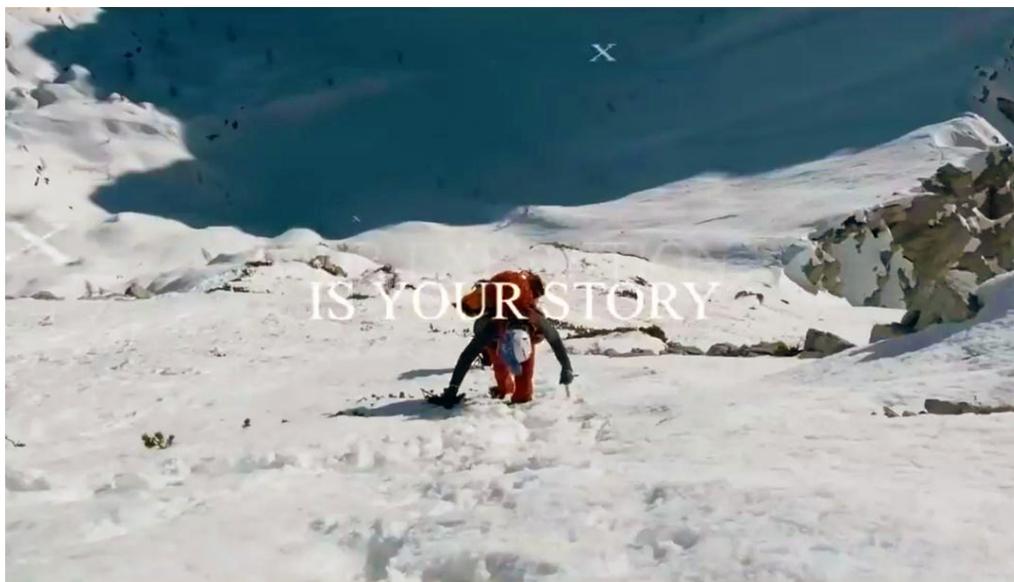
Photo 2: A print screen of the opening of Aljaž Žnidarič's YouTube video *Triglav – We found Grandfather Frost* (Aljaž Žnidaršič 2022).

Now, if one were to simply see Žnidaršič's work of self-presentation as a mere "marketing stunt", presenting an image of himself based on his presupposition of how others (should or desire to) see him – determined, bold, proficient, but also upbeat, reflective and thoughtful, an image behind which a "real" self persists, one would, I believe, miss the point. While this is undoubtedly part of the picture, for Žnidaršič the image is himself. In his work, he aims to show his genuine self – his outlook on life, his authentic experiences, his true feelings. He explained that to achieve this, he experimented at length with different techniques and technologies. "With the kind of pictures [that might be digitally altered in post-production] that I make now," Žnidaršič emphasized, "I'm the closest I've ever been to [capturing] my feelings on the tour itself, on the location itself." He openly admits that he carefully curates his online brand-persona, crafting it into an upbeat, joyful individual focused nearly exclusively on climbing and mountaineering, purposefully leaving out potential "bad

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Confessionals are a stylistic device commonly employed in reality television and function as a type of aside by presenting cutaways to close-up shots of one or more cast members speaking directly to the camera. These segments are used to deliver narration, exposition, and personal commentary on the events unfolding on the show. Žnidaršič, like many other content creators, regularly begins his videos with such confessionals, thus breaking the fourth wall – and connecting with "the community" – from the start.

days" and other activities he might otherwise be interested in. The selected images are a prosthesis of his identity (Lury 2004). Nevertheless, he does not see this practice as one of staging or pretending because, as he puts it, he is sincerely captivated by the mountains and is "an optimist by nature and ha[s] an optimistic outlook on things" (Žnidaršič 2024). His point, in short, is that in his work of self-promotion, he does not present a fake self, but is rather disavowing any "negative" aspects – he publicises and advances a partial real self. This (hy-per)version of himself is his "positive face" (Kozorog 2024), not only an image formed through his presupposition of how others view him, but also a part, the essence of his imaginary identity, of what he, to himself, is. An identity that is actualised outdoors, "in nature" (mediated via YouTube or Instagram).

Nevertheless, we should not forget that in late capitalism, particularly in the creative industries and in the digital economy, where videographers and online content creators such as Žnidaršič are trying to make a living, labourers are compelled to take a leap of faith to succeed – which includes the creative expression or invention of their true selves (Bajič 2017: 195). They are structurally posited in such a way that the image of the risk-loving, extra-calculative "entrepreneur" literally makes sense (no wonder that climbing is becoming increasingly popular among young creative professionals); apropos the content creators it is important to note, then, that the move from self-presentation to the entrepreneur of the self (Christiaens 2019; see also Lazzarato 2012) designates a shift from a self as a value to a value producing self.

<u>Between a rock and a non-place</u>

Hrvoje Grancarić is an avid rock climber in his early forties, a crag developer and topo designer, as well as a frequent social media user that primarily posts his climbing performances. Based in Zadar, where he also heads the local sport climbing club Paklenica, Grancarić alluded to a peculiar paradox when discussing the difference between indoor gym climbing and outdoor climbing "in nature" on "real rock":

> So, in climbing there is indoor climbing, which is becoming more and more popular. And there is climbing in nature. These are two different worlds. So, the new generations, relatively speaking, mostly climb in gyms. And they perceive it as some kind of fitness, crossfit, some type of exercise, which is convenient for them in those urban milieus [*urbanih sredinah*]. They don't even want to go [climb outdoors], they're not so much [interested] in nature, it's not that big of a factor for them. Because climbing, let's not forget, is a dangerous sport and is not for everyone. A mistake costs dearly. And some have problems with the fear of heights. But, having said that, climbing in nature provides all this ... It means a break from these urban milieus ... So, it's such a *Zen* for me. We come to nature. And if you have a bad climbing day, if you don't climb [anything noteworthy], just the fact that you spent six, eight, ten hours in nature, that is your reward. You get to go to such crazy locations. Let's say, one of the very attractive, new locations, which I will go to tomorrow, if everything goes well, and on Sunday, is Vranjača. Vranjača Cave, where I also drilled my own route the other day. The cave is spectacular. And the world's best climber has already been there twice. What I'm saying is, photos don't do it justice. (Grancarić, 2024)

The paradox implicit in Grancarić's words concerns relationships with and attitudes towards specific places and their character, or rather the lack thereof. He is touching on non-places found not indoors, but, against expectations, outdoors, "in nature". Claiming that an indoor climbing gym, the kind which today can be found just about anywhere (Camoletto and Marcelli 2020), is not "formed by individual identities, through complicities of language, local references, the unformulated rules of living" but rather "creates the shared identity of [ascensionists], customers or Sunday [climbers]", to (mis)quote Marc Augé (1995: 101), would be to state the obvious. However, Grancarić's mention of the world's best climber – he is referring to the Czech climber Adam Ondra – suggests that climbing outdoors is likewise a (near) global phenomenon, with climbers travelling all over the world to temporarily stop at particular spots and, well, climb some rocks. For Grancarić, Vranjača may indeed be what is termed a "home crag" in climbing jargon. For Ondra and a multitude of other climbers, not only professional athletes but globetrotting YouTuber climbers and vacationers, however, Vranjača, like any other crag, represents just another special place, an "outdoor playground" (Bell in Poljak Istenič and Kozorog 2014: 42), an "adventurescape" (Poljak Istenič and Kozorog 2014), imagined through both a "traditional" mixture of notions of wilderness and, of course, nature as removed from frantic everyday life, and the more contemporary social media portrayals of the outdoors as destinations for self-actualisation (Božić-Vrbančič 2025), lifestyle authenticity (Rickly-Boyd 2012), and digital escape (Miller and Horst 2014: 12–15). In fact, Ondra himself published a video of his second visit to Vranjača which featured his ascent of the extremely difficult route *B je to!,* making the video also extremely YouTubable and attention-grabbing in the online climbing community. He thus contributed to constructing the cave as a rock climbing area for people everywhere, whilst simultaneously making that place a nowhere.

Photo 3: Adam Ondra's ascent of *B je to!* in Vranjača Cave as shown in the YouTube video Hardest Route in Croatia - *B je to!* 9b | *Commented Climb by Adam Ondra* (Adam Ondra, 2023).

With the advent of climbing social media, within the online climbing community, it is no longer simply that we are "displaced in nature" (Dickinson 2011) through a network of routes, topoi, ethics, i.e. more or less global rules of conduct among climbers, governing climbing itself, care for the rock, equipment, and the like. Today we are displaced (and disciplined), or de-territorialised, as are the places themselves, via social media imagery (from drone-produced videos and digital augmentation to GPS tracks and positioning-apps), algorithmic structures, scoring and ranking games, whereby imagery and affective intensities, or, in a word, aesthetics, take on greater importance in our activities (Dean 2010: 21–22). The imagery in Ondra's video is indeed spectacular. It shows him climbing near the limit of what is (currently seen as) humanly possible in "an impressive cave of Vranjača in Croatia" (Adam Ondra 2023). The video is exemplary in displaying how persons within specific settings are captured and contextualised, turning the former into performers and displacing the latter into non-places. Such places are chosen for their ability to become YouTubable non-places – unique, attractive, spectacular, yet generic, homely, typical. During one of his confessionals in the video, Ondra is sitting in front of a rock face and states: "I'm here." He is, of course, refereeing to Vranjača, and watching the video, one is led to believe that he is sitting somewhere in front of the cave. Ondra, however, made his confessionals in the crag of Ter, just south of Solčavsko, in the foothills of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps (which I was able to recognise thanks to the kerosene lamp hanging on the wall of what used to be my home crag).

As Senka Božić-Vrbančić (2025) has shown, as places, Vranjača or Ter hardly being exceptions, are displaced thorough hypercommodified, algorithmically programmed conditions of communicative capitalism, they become destinations we can never reach (yet, in one form or another, increasingly often pay to enter, and are thus sources of monopoly rents (Harvey 2002)). Nevertheless, once we do (not) reach them, we are expected to have fun and work there.

<u>Labouring on the wall</u>

The productions of many a climbing content creator on YouTube often include extended scenes of shenanigans, gags, practical jokes, pranks, or simply the content creator goofing around with friends on and off the wall. Perhaps even more importantly, these scenes are usually staged in such a way that the viewer feels as if they are there, joining in the liveliness as a member of the "crew". Indeed, the viewer is often directly addressed, discursively and visually, and is even invited to try certain exercises, feats or workouts and subsequently post their results and/or videos in the comments. However, the shenanigans may be, and frequently they indeed are, instantly swapped for, interspersed with or nearly imperceptibly substituted with much more serious matters, if the two were distinct at all in the first place as the intensity of the performances themselves may appear comical: climbers "trying hard" on their boulders, "working the problem" of the route, "having a session" on the wall, "following a protocol" of exercise, or even "pushing the grade" of what is possible. These, in turn, regularly turn into laboured grunting or frustrated screams, only to begin joking anew.

The highly informal character of both the content and the form, as well as the ambiguity between the playfulness and the drudgery of climbing embody what Sianne Ngai (2012) described as the aesthetics of the zany. According to her, the zany indexes the "politically ambiguous intersection between cultural and occupational performance, acting and service, playing and laboring" (Ngai 2012: 182). With it, "action [can be] pushed to physically strenuous extremes", and "an intensely willing and desiring subjectivity" is presupposed (Ngai 2012: 184). The former, in the present context, is obviously epitomised by the climbing itself, the latter in the recurrent underscoring of the importance to have fun and enjoy yourself, the need to want "it" badly, or in short, the significance of the "psyche" (cf. Wheaton 2013).

While amongst the more moderate climbing content creators as far as zaniness goes, Rudi Nadlučnik, who posts on his YouTube channel under the moniker Alpine Boyz, nevertheless, and rather spontaneously, replicates all the tropes of this style. The reason for the moderate approach is perhaps related to the fact that his videos are marked by his place of employment, an outdoor adventure activities and camping agency, or that, as he puts it, his primary audience is himself when he reaches old age. At any rate, his videos tend to combine footage of laborious approaches and daring ascents usually in his "backyard" mountains in the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, above Logar Valley and Roban Cirque, in particular, sometimes even done in *free solo style*,[9] interspersed with more mellow situations of joking around with the viewer or with his companions while driving, on the walk-in, during sledding on the snow-covered slopes, or simply while having a snack somewhere safe.

Interestingly, when reflecting on his past work, Nadlučnik mentioned as "special" a video he did not manage to record due to technical difficulties with his recording equipment. What he thus missed were the technical difficulties of the climb itself.

> I almost regret not being able to record that pitch. My camera had broken down just when it would have been perfect to capture something on video. It was one of those times when I couldn't record the hardest part of the route – right there where it would have been amazing to see something. This was at the exit from the Ridge of Mala Rinka Mountain. The snow was unprocessed [i.e. not compact], I had to clear everything myself, and those 40 meters took me an hour, maybe an hour and a half. It was technically demanding, and I had to use every bit of knowledge I had, improvising any way I could to pull myself out. I was literally clawing at the rock, with everything buried in untouched snow. [...] When Jakob and I climbed it, I remember thinking, 'Will I even make it through?' [...] The biggest problem was that Jakob, as the second climber, faced almost the same difficulty since I covered up everything I had cleared. Total disaster. What would normally take us the entire route, we spent on that single pitch alone – it took us 40 minutes just to get out. I couldn't record anything. I only managed to record on my phone when he came over the edge with Mrzla Gora Mountain in the background, and it was really a beautiful shot. (Nadlučnik, 2024)

Still, the video as such is imperfect, because, as the above quote from Nadlučnik suggests, it lacks the footage of the pair (zanily?) toiling on the crux pitch. Nadlučnik's frustra-

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Free solo climbing is a type of climbing where climbers climb alone without using ropes or any protective gear.

tion over the absent recording can also be understood as frustration with the flawed framing of the presented scene. It is deficient in that it does not show – merely suggests – labouring on the wall. The YouTube "short" in question is missing the key ingredient in the zany's "mix of desperation and playfulness [that many find] so aesthetically appealing" (Ngai 2012: 188).
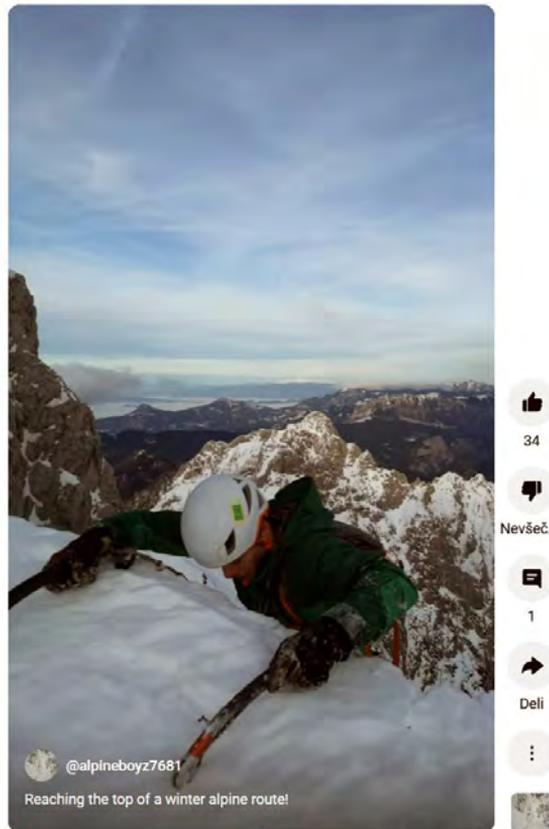
Photo 4: Alpine Boyz' "short" of the laborious winter ascent of Mala Rinka Mountain (Alpine Boyz 2023).

Nevertheless, the question remains: why does the zany "need" to be desperate and stressed out, not only animated and frolicsome? Sianne Ngai argues that "this playful, hyper-charismatic aesthetic is really an aesthetic about work – and about a precariousness created specifically by the capitalist organization of work" (2012: 188). She cautions, however, that the zany is not "identical or reducible to capitalism but driven primarily by its contradictory logic of incessant expansion" (Ngai 2012: 188), within which, in late capitalism, one's self is, as argued above, (re)structured as a source of value, as so-called human capital. The zany, then, is not an aesthetic "just about work, but about the 'putting to work' of affect and subjectivity for the generation of surplus value" (Ngai 2012: 188). Now, I am by no means suggesting that Nadlučnik's aim – or the aim of any other interlocutor or climbing content

creator – was (self-)exploitation. Rather, I am arguing that this "short", even if imperfectly, like so many other works on YouTube and other social media platforms, reproduces the zany aesthetics that contribute to the normalisation of the notion that hard work and play, strain and success are inextricably linked. In fact, not only that, on climbing YouTube, effort and enjoyment are completely aligned, and any attempt to separate them would come across as strange, negativistic, or quite simply as "killing the vibe".

The paradox that speaks volumes about the historically changing relation to production is that the more the zany comes to dominate our perception, the more natural it feels, the less we are able to articulate it (Ngai 2012: 230–232) – and thus begin to change it. The passage from "feeling natural" to "natural feeling", the correlation of "nature" and "growth" often made on social media, thus become ideologically significant in that it naturalises befitting structures of feeling, ways of conduct, and frames of thinking: aestheticized nature as a venue of play-cum-labour entices prosumers to follow "the right path" (cf. Grebowicz 2015: 18–29). However, why precisely would one desire to do so?

TO CHANGE THE SETTING

Throughout this article I have argued that through social media, with their reliance on imagery, algorithmic infrastructures, and structurally preferred aesthetics, identities, places, and performances are re-imagined and de-centred as (hy-per)version of one's self, non-places, and performances of performances, respectively. By way of three ethnographic vignettes, each zeroing in on one aspect of the process, I have argued that social media content tends to contribute, whilst being a particularly structured and structuring space of expression, to a particular imaginary, i.e. cultural and ideological, relation to the real conditions of existence in late, "creative" capitalism (cf. Kozorog 2024). This has led me to pose one final question: why would one be taken in by such images? In other words, what does outdoor adventure imagery, including climbing, promise?

Following Timothy Morton (2007), nature can effectively be conceived as a screen: on the one hand, a canvas on which we paint our pictures, according to our own desires, and on the other hand, a veil concealing a complex system of relations, including one's own positionality within it. It is not much different with computer and mobile phone screens. Nature, implicitly or explicitly "painted" in the social media imagery of climbing, or, I add, of outdoor adventure sports, helps content creators, and prosumers more generally, imagine their ideal selves, depicting "nature" as the scene in which these ideal selves "work hard and play hard". Although produced retroactively, through the very use of social media (and other "machines"), nature appears as always already – naturally, so to speak – "there" (see fn. 7). As such, nature "encapsulates a potentially infinite series of disparate fantasy objects" (Morton 2007: 14), making an inquiry into its digital depictions, "Rorschach blobs of others' enjoyment, [...] a highly appropriate way of beginning to engage with how 'nature' compels feelings and beliefs" (Morton 2007: 14).

If, by imagining themselves in accordance with certain images, they aim to be recognised, both by others and by oneself as adventurous, determined risk-takers who are, moreo-

ver, fully enjoying themselves, yet still respectful towards nature (*sensu* Sharma), the outdoor prosumers, by mediating these imageries via specific aesthetic categories and algorithmically infrastructures, subject themselves to the very conditions which they seek to leave behind. For while I have not dwelled on this point here, nature tends to be culturally posited as antithetical to the "normal" course of everyday life in the contemporary world (see Bajič 2014), digitally mediated ones included. Thus, we stumble upon an apparent paradox: the more one wants to "return to nature", the more one's practice is nowadays conditioned on, and by, digital media and technology. "Digitalised" nature is a privileged cultural space where middle-class fantasies of "escape" are played out (Miller and Horst 2012: 11–15). In other words, while the climbing or the outdoor adventure fantasy – a fantasy, i.e. the "story" through which we relate to our objects of desire, to enjoyment (Žižek 1998), thriving on social media – relates climbers to nature, promises them authenticity and escape, the "means of its production" subject them to the harsh realities of late capitalism which they are trying to escape.

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POVZETEK

Članek na primeru plezanja raziskuje, kako družbeni mediji, natančneje YouTube, vplivajo na predstavitve identitete, prostora in nastopanja pri adrenalinskih športih na prostem. Trdi, da predstavitve, ki jih oblikujejo algoritemske infrastrukture in specifične estetike, ustvarjajo »YouTubabilno« vsebino – performativna, spektakularna dejanja in kraji, optimizirani za digitalno protrošnjo. Na podlagi teh predstavitev se na novo zamišljajo identitete kot (hi-per)verzije sebe, kraji se z izgubo krajevnosti spremenijo v nekraje, nastopanje pa prežema norčava estetika, s čimer postanejo uprizoritve uprizoritev, kar izpostavlja njihovo širšo povezanost s poznokapitalistično produkcijo.

V etnografskih vinjetah so predstavljeni učinki tistega, kar je poimenovano digitalna estetizacija – algoritemsko začrtan, pa vseeno »personaliziran« proces ustvarjanja, kroženja in potrošnje določene estetike, ki kroji dojemanje, okuse in dovzetnost ter hkrati učinkovito zatira izraze, ki odstopajo od zakoreninjenih, komercialno uspešnih vzorcev. Te predstavitve so nastale na podlagi avtorjevega dolgotrajnega etnografskega raziskovanja ustvarjalcev digitalnih vsebin, s poudarkom na pustolovskih dejavnostih na prostem. Črpajo iz etnografskih sprehodov, intervjujev in opazovanja z udeležbo, tako na spletu kot

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v živo, pa tudi »nekje vmes« (Przybylski 2020). Prispevek na primerih ustvarjalcev vsebine o plezanju prikazuje, kako njihovo delo spaja osebne zgodbe s kulturnimi predstavami o pustolovščinah, tveganju in avtentičnosti. S kuriranjem samopredstavitev so »negativni« vidiki posameznikovega jaza odstranjeni in identitete na novo zamišljene kot (hi-per) verzije jaza. Podobno kraji, ki so bili dojeti in predstavljeni kot spektakularni ter primerni za določene prizore, potem ko jim algoritemske strukture odvzamejo krajevnost, asimptotično postajajo nekraji (Augé 1995). Nastopi pa so prežeti z norčavo estetiko, s čimer postanejo uprizoritve uprizoritev, kar kaže na njihovo širšo povezanost s poznokapitalistično produkcijo (Ngai 2012).

Prispevek na podlagi Mortona (2007) sklene, da lahko naravo vidimo kot zaslon: platno, ki odseva hrepenenja, in tančico, ki zastira relacijske kompleksnosti. Naravo lahko torej razumemo kot nekaj, kar uteleša raznorazne fantazije. Ta »digitalizirana« narava deluje kot platforma za fantazije srednjega razreda o pobegu, čeprav te fantazije – ki uspevajo na družbenih omrežjih – konec koncev navdušence nad športi na prostem postavljajo prav v to realnost poznega kapitalizma, ki ji želijo ubežati.

From Pasture-Lands to Wilderness: How Velebit Became the Ultimate Place of Wilderness and Adventure

Od pašnikov do divjine: kako je Velebit postal popoln kraj divjine in pustolovščine

Sanja Đurin

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the Velebit mountain range and how it has become established within wilderness discourse. For the sake of tourism, it is today presented as "wild", as a place of adventure and wilderness; however, Velebit mountain was for centuries a place where herders and their families coexisted with the Velebit landscape. This article discusses the dominant wilderness narrative of Velebit mountain range in the context of adventure tourism. The discourse on Velebit has changed in the past ten to fifteen years, ever since tourism in Croatia has been taken in a new direction with the goal of becoming a destination for active holidays. Based on ethnographic and archival work, online content, blogs and travel literature analysis, the paper describes this switch in the cultural meaning of Velebit.

KEYWORDS: wilderness, adventure, tourism, commodification, Velebit mountain range

IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava gorovje Velebit in njegovo umestitev v diskurz o divjini. Čeprav je Velebit že stoletja kraj, kjer sobivajo pastirji, njihove družine in velebitska pokrajina, pa je danes zaradi turizma območje predstavljeno kot »divje«, kot kraj pustolovščin in divjine. Članek se ukvarja s prevladujočim diskurzom o divjini velebitskega gorovja v kontekstu pustolovskega turizma. Diskurz o Velebitu se je spremenil v zadnjih desetih do petnajstih letih, odkar je cilj turizma na Hrvaškem postati destinacija za aktivne počitnice. Prispevek na pod-

lagi etnografskega in arhivskega dela, spletnih vsebin, blogov in analize potopisne literature ponuja vpogled v to spremembo kulturnega pomena Velebita.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: divjina, pustolovščina, turizem, poblagovljanje, gorovje Velebit

INTRODUCTION

In the holidays and travel columns of daily newspapers or internet portals in Croatia, we often come across texts that suggest visiting or booking some of the activities on Velebit. If you are a foreign tourist in Croatia and want to have an active holiday, again you will be offered "wild" and "dramatic" Velebit experiences. Enticing titles will convince you that "[t]his dramatic mountain chain, right on the Adriatic coast in Croatia, is one of the wildest areas of the whole Mediterranean" (Rewilding Europe 2023). The "[w]ild Velebit" is described as "a mythical Croatian mountain where bears, wolves and lynx still meet" (Croexpress 2018). Similarly, another website proclaims that the "[u]ntouched parts of Nature in National parks Northern Velebit and Paklenica are the ideal places to experience a Medditerean from a different angle" (Highlander 2023). These are just some of the numerous titles that today, as in the last ten to fifteen years, construct how the Velebit mountain range is talked about and imagined.

Wilderness has been shaped through multiple shifting discourses. Traced back to the 12th century, the word once described spaces where wild animals roamed, places defined not by human absence but by non-human presence. By the 19th century, Romanticism and colonial imaginaries began to recast wilderness as a space of purity, increasingly tied to ideas of untouched landscapes – an absence not just of people, but of specific people. In the Croatian context today, traces of these layered histories persist in how wilderness is invoked, sometimes gesturing toward preservation, sometimes toward the exclusion of local people and their past. While I do not map these histories in full here, I focus on the dominant framing of wilderness as land relatively untouched by large-scale human development, used among other things as a place for adventure tourism. Velebit is often presented in public narratives in that sense: as a home to wild animals and as a place where humans are absent. But Velebit is far from being an "untouched wilderness". It was inhabited for centuries, a place where herders, their families, and the mountain coexisted. Every meadow, every small piece of land along the one-hundred-and-fifty-kilometer rocky mountain range was used by people as pastures, gardens, or children's playgrounds. Velebit was teeming with life. Today only old records, photographs and piles of stacked stones that were once the homes, stanovi, of herders and their families remain to tell us about it,[1] while public discourses construct it

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1

A few old documentaries and photos testify to this rich life in the past. I would especially like to mention the documentary *Mali svijet – Velebit je velika planina* [Small world – Velebit is a big mountain] directed by Željko Belić in 1970. The documentary presents children's everyday lives on the Tulove grede part of the mountain during the herding of cattle to the pastures on Velebit. In the past, children often spent their summers looking after the livestock. Two other documentaries on the topic of herding worth mentioning are *Tragom Bukovičkih stočara* [In the footsteps of the Bukovica herders] directed by Andrija Stojanović in 1970, and the silent film *Velebit* by Kamilo Brössler from 1932. Many photos featuring herding and life on Velebit were taken by Radivoj Simonović (and are published in Šekarić 2019).

in a different way. Spatial meanings are culturally constructed (Rodman 1992) and Velebit is not an exception – its meanings and the way it is represented have changed through time. For the last ten to fifteen years, Velebit has become increasingly popular as a tourist destination. The recent popularisation of outdoor activities and active tourism in Croatia have created narratives in which Velebit is a place of wilderness, adventure, and contemplation. These narratives are creating an imaginary of an untouched, "virgin", untamed Velebit wilderness that attracts an increasing number of outdoor enthusiasts. Wilderness, then, comes into focus as an attractive niche for travel agencies and the tourism business. In my conception of tourism, I follow Matilde Córdoba Azcárate:

> Tourism's centrality to the organization of contemporary life makes it a force that extends well beyond the economic realm. Tourism also pervades the sociocultural, political, and ecological arenas. The tourist industry is one of the leading producers of global imaginaries. It is a powerful form of meaning-making: narratives of the self and other, conceptions of the past and the future, and dreams of natural and cultural encounters are produced by tourism through desire, anticipation, and memorabilia. [...] Over the last decades, the tourist industry has massively reorganized and repurposed the physicality of places to fit those dreams and imaginaries, recreating the untouched tropical island, the primitive native village, the pristine natural reserve, the authentic past. It has done so through specially curated built environments and infrastructures that aim to foster consumption – the oceanfront all-inclusive resort, the restored colonial building, the scenic highway, the theme park – and through discourses of contemplation, cultural encounter, heritage preservation, cultural remediation, indigenous empowerment, civic engagement, or sustainable participation. (Córdoba Azcárate 2020: 5–6)

Since my research on the impact of tourism on Velebit, or more precisely the municipality of Starigrad and the Paklenica National Park, is still ongoing, I will not be able to present all the infrastructural and discursive means with which the tourist industry influences the organisation of contemporary life in Velebit and its foothills in this article, but I will point out some of the challenges that have come to the fore through my research to date. So far, the impact of adventure tourism on the protected areas of Croatia has not been problematised.

This paper is based on archival work and ethnographic research conducted among residents of the Velebit foothills, outdoor enthusiasts, adventure tour guides, and adventure sports practitioners in Croatia. In the two years that I have been working on this topic, I have spoken to more than fifty people. Some of my research has been conducted using semi-structured interviews, and some through informal, incidental conversations. I see incidental conversations as equally important as any other interview. Casual conversation conveys a part of the atmosphere of how Velebit is experienced, interpreted or made visible by its visitors. According to Senka Božić-Vrbančić, incidental conversations provide a "broader social atmosphere – an atmosphere which made it natural" (Božić-Vrbančić 2023) that Velebit is presented and perceived as a wilderness today.

In addition to formal and informal conversations, I have analysed online content, blogs and travel literature related to the Velebit mountain to deconstruct the construction of Velebit as a wilderness. Furthermore, I have gained a great deal of information and numerous insights into the assumptions and conclusions presented in this paper by reading

and analysing travel literature about Velebit,[2] mountaineers' diaries, and old issues of the magazines *Hrvatski planinar* [Croatian Mountaineer] and *Naše planine* [Our Mountains].

Since I myself am engaged in outdoor activities and have been part of the outdoor community in Croatia in my private life for more than twenty years, apart from an ethic, I dare say that I also have an emic insight into the topics I am talking about here. My own experience as an outdoor practitioner means many years of immersion in the outdoor scene in Croatia, from being involved with the first outdoor online portals, the first outdoor adventure programs and their organisers, to the initial problems they encountered in trying to make Croatia a destination for active tourism. Furthermore, the practice of outdoor activities has allowed me to conduct my field research in a very relaxed atmosphere, to talk with outdoor practitioners and locals in circumstances where associations, ideas and answers related to the topic they talked about (and which was also the subject of my research) flowed very spontaneously, in a relaxed way and without restraint. In addition, I worked in tourism for more than a decade as a student. In the early 2000s, I worked in several diving centres on the coast, where I came into direct contact with the national policies related to active tourism. I also worked for large tourist agencies. All of these personal experiences and involvement have made me extra cautious regarding my research questions and conclusions. It is also important to keep in mind the advantages and disadvantages of each method. In this sense, I agree with John Law and John Urry (2004), who believe that no research method is innocent because all methods are performative, so it is important to be aware of your research position and how you will present the results of your research.

VELEBIT: FROM PASTURE-LANDS TO WILDERNESS

As mentioned in the introduction, place and its meaning are not simply given, they are "politicized social and cultural construct[s]" (Rodman 1992: 640, cf. Campbell 2005; Repič 2018). Apart from Petar Zoranić's pastoral-allegorical novel *Planine* [Mountains][3] from the 16th century, where Velebit was mentioned for the first time in written form and adored as a mythical place, the mountain range entered public discourse at the end of the 19th century. This is the period when it became scientifically interesting. In this sense, if we exclude the local population, the first visitors of mountains and mountaineers in Croatia were mostly university professors of the natural sciences, geologists, botanists, biologists, and writers.[4] This is how the discursive production on Velebit started. Although they perceived Velebit as

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[2]
Among the titles, see Birtić (2016), Forenbacher (2000), Majerović-Stilinović (2020), Popović (2013), Popović and Vukušić (2018), Rac (2010), and Šavorić (2021).

[3]
The novel was written in 1536 and published in 1569 in Venice.

[4]
The Croatian Mountaineering Association was founded in 1874 on the initiative of Johannes Frischauf (1837–1924), a mathematics professor at the University of Graz. During his visit to Mount Klek in April 1874, he met the writer Buda Budisavljević (1843–1919) and the son of Ban Mažuranić, Vladimir Mažuranić (1845–1928), in Ogulin, and suggested a mountaineering society be established in Croatia. This society, like similar societies in other European countries at time, was research-oriented (Poljak 2004).

an instance of wilderness, their purpose was, as we learn from the first issue of the *Hrvatski planinar* magazine (1898), to learn about and research its biological, geographical, hydrographical and other specificities.[5]

However, well before Velebit attracted the interest of researchers, the local communities along the Adriatic coast lived alongside and relied on the mountain for its fertile meadows (see Photo 1). Pasturing took various forms on Velebit, from alpine to transhumance (Belaj 2004; cf. Černicki and Forenbacher 2016; Lemić 2023; Vinšćak 1989). Alpine livestock farming is specific in that during the winter, the families lived together with their livestock in the lowlands, along the coast where the climate is warmer. In the summer, entire families would relocate to modest stone houses called *stanovi* in the higher mountain regions, where they lived alongside their livestock until the autumn. This seasonal migration was driven by the need for better grazing opportunities, more fertile land for crops and vegetables, and the harvesting of grass for winter cattle feed. The decline of herding life on

Photo 1: Libinje, a fertile plateau with gardens and *stanovi* in the interior of southern Velebit, photo by Radivoj Simonović, 1910. Source: the photography collection of the Museum of Vojvodina in Novi Sad, no. 524 (IEF photo 20615).

[5]

As Foucault (1961) noted, since the second half of the 18th century, European thought has been preoccupied with categorisations and systematisations, the "great tidying up" that determines and assigns a place, a position in the social order to every object, every living and non-living being. Mountaineering societies were created to carry out this task in the natural, biological, and geological world. If we take this into account, mountaineering also marks the entry of mountains, nature, plants, and animals into the processes of listing, categorising, and structuring in order to make nature easier to monitor and manage. Furthermore, nature also served a function in nation-building projects (Gissibl, Hohller and Kupper 2012).

Velebit began in the 1950s, when the Adriatic coast at the base of the mountain began gaining recognition as a tourist destination due to the clean sea waters and pleasant summer weather (Vukonić 2005; Duda 2014).

In Starigrad Paklenica, where I have been conducting my fieldwork, tourism and the decline of the traditional ways of living and herding likewise began in the 1950s. In the words of one of my interlocutors: "The government at that time encouraged the local population to abandon cattle breeding and mountain life in favour of tourism" (Marin, 60).[6] The shift from cattle breeding to tourism significantly impacted the local population. In 1949, the southern part of Velebit was designated a national park, called National Park Paklenica, further attracting tourists and altering traditional ways of life. One interlocutor told me that "goat breeding has been banned in the region since goats consumed excessive vegetation, hindering the park's natural regeneration" (Ivica, 72).

On the other hand, the locals knew nothing about tourism and the customs of foreign tourists coming to their coastal villages every summer: "These [the locals] were uneducated people. They didn't know what *wiener schnitzel* was, they learned how to prepare it, how to cook, they learned to do what the tourists asked for from scratch" (Marin, 60). At the same time, tourism also had a positive impact. It "open[ed] up unexpected collaborations, spaces of hope, and opportunities for well-being that previously did not exist" (Córdoba Azcárate 2020: 3). In the words of my interlocutor:

> You know, for locals Velebit isn't something nice. It is a reminder of a harsh life, suffering, poverty. The sea and tourism saved them from it. They don't see the beauty of Paklenica in the way we younger generations see it. They don't understand why someone would go for a walk on Velebit. (Dunja, 38)

Although tourism has initiated numerous social and cultural changes in the Starigrad Paklenica municipality, as well as on the Croatian coast in general (Gračan and Lucić 2022; Mariam et al. 2023; Soldić Frleta, Đurkin Badurina and Dwyer 2020), my intention here is not to dwell on the disappearance of the traditional way of life in the region. I introduced a few examples here as a counter-narrative to the dominant narrative of Velebit as wild. I will now focus on the last fifteen years, on the period when active or outdoor tourism became popular in Croatia. This has also taken place in the Paklenica National Park and its surroundings, and in the following chapters I will point out some of its problematic aspects.

DISCURSIVE PRODUCTION OF WILDERNESS AND ADVENTURE (FOR THE SAKE OF TOURISM)

Adventure culture is discursively produced (Lynch, Moore and Minchington 2012; Nerlich 1987) and many scholars today agree that people are looking for adventure as a counter-

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[6]
Statistics confirm this. In the period from 1952 to 1960, Croatia recorded a growth rate of 21.1 percent in total overnight stays, 31.4 percent in foreign overnight stays, and 19.1 percent in domestic overnight stays (Vukonić 2005: 136).

point to the boring, predictable and repetitive everyday existence of urban life (Bradburd 2006; Burušić Barčan, Fletko and Rudanović 2019; De Knop and Van Hoecke 2003; Poljak Istenič and Kozorog 2013). There are many definitions of adventure (Beames, Mackie and Atenico 2019; Bell 2016; Buckley 2010; D'Ammassa 2009; Lynch, Moore and Minchington 2012; Nerlich 1987; Simmel 1911), but common to all of them is that adventure is an exception to the everyday, that it includes excitement and risk, and is a subjective and relative term (Beames, Mackie and Atencio 2019: 4; Buckley 2006: 7). Beames, Mackie and Atencio (2019) state that the common characteristics of adventure are: elements of challenge, excitement and (in most cases) risk; they take place in demanding natural or artificially created environments; they are much more relaxed in their organisation than popular mainstream sports; they represent freedom from or opposition to the dominant sports culture; they are individualistic but tend to build a group or a subculture.

Although we can say that eagerness for adventure is a global phenomenon today, the meaning of adventure is also created locally by narratives in adventure magazines and books, by digital media, local stories and travelogues (Miles and Wattchow 2015: 17), by tourist brochures and travel blogs which add additional value to particular places, making them tourist (or/and adventure) destinations (Bertoša, Muhvić-Dimanovski and Skelin Horvat 2012: 167; Han, Lovett and Law 2022). This is especially true for national and nature parks, which due to their biodiversity already have special value in national contexts. Since adventure is positioned as a counterpoint to urban life, it is often consumed in non-urban areas, in national or nature parks which are *per se* defined as wilderness (Cronon 1995). We can say that adventure has been commodified and has become a "sticky word" as Sara Ahmed (2004) would put it. It is sticky in the sense that adventure as the feeling of excitement is positioned as an object of our desire, something we strive for, about which we feel emotional. In that sense it becomes good bait for marketing certain destinations or products that we consume or enjoy (MacCannell 2011: 53) in our free time. Following the industrial revolution and romanticism, mountain landscapes were discursively constructed as special places, places of wilderness and adventure (Macfarlane 2004; Smith 1984). What Henry David Thoreau and John Muir began in America in the latter half of the 19th century by describing inaccessible territories as paradise-like wilderness later transferred to Europe, where wilderness and the sublime beauty of nature have been used to shape the national consciousness and foster patriotism (Barnard 2006; Campbell 2005; Duda 2012; Mikša and Urban 2013; Šaver 2005). Natural beauty began to be seen as a national asset, leading to the establishment of the first national parks alongside the formation of nation-states. Mountains, nature and protected areas became crucial to a country's valuation (Smith 1984), opening the space for its commodification as an "adventurescape" (Poljak Istenič and Kozorog 2013). At that time, both in Europe and North America, the first tourists, then members of the upper class, encouraged the development of various services in mountain landscapes, from equipment carriers to tourist carriers, from carriage drivers to the owners of restaurants and overnight stays (Bartoluci and Čavlek 2007; Cronon 1995; Duda 2012). Members of the middle class also soon became consumers of nature. Doing outdoor leisure activities was the reaction to

industrialisation and urbanization. These were mainly young white men who saw nature as the opposite of the urban, contributing to the growing movement of outdoor lifestyle and adventure culture, to which wilderness is essential. According to Robert Macfarlane, the commodification of mountains started in the Romantic period, soon after the intellectual and civic elite discovered excitement and fear as feelings that enable deep self-knowledge (Macfarlane 2004). In addition, during this period, mountains were comprehended as places where we are closer to God, and can evoke contemplative feelings (Cronon 1995; Macfarlane 2004). However, not all of these meanings and sentiments regarding mountains can be readily applied to Croatia.

Although Croatia had its own mountaineering society and its own intellectual elite that frequented the mountains by the end of the 19th century, adventure was initially seen as neither attractive nor acceptable to the mountaineers of the time. As Poljak (2004: 60) argued, mountain climbing was considered too risky and foolish. At that time in Croatia, mountaineering was defined in the dominant discourses in the sense of hiking, not climbing steep cliffs. One report of the Croatian Mountaineering Association (Hrvatski Planinarski Savez – HPD) assembly from 1891 states: "We do not believe that it is the task of mountaineers to promote tourist sport, and to endanger human life by climbing steep inaccessible cliffs just to satisfy personal ambition" (cited in Poljak 2004: 50).[7]

Throughout the second half of the 20th century, not too many Croatians were interested in wilderness and looking for adventure either. Mountaineering existed mostly as a social activity, but it was not widespread.[8] I haven't found any statistics on the number of mountaineers over the years in Croatia, but many of my interlocutors agreed that outdoor activities were in general unpopular. As one of them said in 2020:

> Unlike many other countries, starting with Slovenia, Austria, France, England, Americans, who are real outdoor nations, we Croats are not exactly an outdoor nation longing for wilderness. We are a nation that historically lived in the harsh nature, but it was a harsh life and survival, nature was your partner and enemy, depending on the situation. But in this outdoor sense, we are not an outdoor nation. We are a shopping nation, although that is changing now, luckily. Not long ago but recently, maybe in the last ten years, there has been some kind of boom or growth that is still not like in Slovenia, where I think that ninety percent of the people are engaged in some kind of outdoor activity over the weekend, going somewhere. And in our country it is fifteen to twenty

[7] Despite this dominant narrative, individuals interested in steep mountain climbing also existed, but they were in the minority. The division between mountaineers at the beginning of the 20th century was class-based. While academics and the social elite practised hiking in mountain landscapes, individuals from the middle and working classes were eager to undertake serious climbing endeavors. Since the Croatian Mountaineering Association shied away from "acrobatic" (Poljak 2004: 60) rock climbing and hindered the development of mountain climbing, this created constant turmoil among mountaineers in Croatia. In 1923, the rebel mountaineers founded the Croatian Tourist Club "Sljeme", and made the first climbing ascents in the Swiss Alps, paving the way for mountain climbing (Poljak 2004: 50).

[8] Throughout the second half of the 20th century, hiking was the most popular outdoor activity in Croatia, but the total number of hikers in Croatia was small. There is no statistical data on the number of hikers over the years, although there were, for example, 32,776 registered members of the Croatian Mountaineering Association in 2018 (which in addition to hikers also includes alpinists, speleologists, and sport climbers), which is 7.65 percent of the total population of the Republic of Croatia. However, these days, interest in participating in mountaineering schools is constantly growing.

percent in this boom, and before that it was two to five percent, if at all … So, in that sense, the outdoors did not exist in our country. We have a tradition in the Mountaineering Association, it is the only institution that has been keeping up with the times. (Danijel, 59)

It was not until recently that the attitude towards outdoor activities and hiking changed significantly. The reasons why this change happened have been written about extensively. As already mentioned, some authors think that going outdoors and looking for adventure is compensation for what a person lacks in everyday life, which is an active life and excitement or adventure (Burušić Barčan, Fletko and Rudanović 2019; De Knop and Van Hoecke 2003). Some think that the change was driven by economic, environmental, migrant and other crises of today (Božić-Vrbančić and Đurin 2021; Salecl 2011), by social media and the development of digital technologies, the use of smartphones, smartwatches, and applications; by the opening of large retail chains of sports equipment at affordable prices (such as Decathlon in 2014); by new forms of sports facilities such as running schools or guided hiking tours which create new forms of sociability and build new subcultures (Markić, Bijakšić and Bevanda 2018; Đurin 2022). Here I will focus in more detail on the changes that have occurred in terms of tourism policy. It is important to pay attention to the new legislation regulating active or adventure tourism[9] in Croatia because it has turned mountains and other natural landscapes into "adventurescapes", i.e. into commodities that can be experienced or consumed.

COMMODIFYING NATURAL
HERITAGE IN CROATIA

After World War II and especially in the late 1970s in the Western world, and in Croatia in the late 1990s, mass tourism became popular as a practice and a sign of social progress (Duda 2014; Mowforth and Munt 2015). That period was based on the logic of the 3S tourism model of sun, sea, and sand. In the late 1990s the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) created new trends in tourism, where the 3S model was replaced by the 4H model of history, heritage, handicrafts, and habitat (Smith 1996). This reversal and change of focus opened up the possibility for the commodification of cultural and natural heritage and the creation of destination tourism, including the promotion of active tourism (Huddart and Stott 2020). As Córdoba Azcárate puts it: "Once ordered under the tourist gaze as locations one can escape to and/or where one can encounter nature or other cultures, places and people become in practice 'positional goods': goods whose value derives from their spatial position in socioeconomic fields of meaning and practice" (2020: 14). In this sense, tourism became "one of the most efficient capitalist technologies, thanks to its almost unmatched capacity to advance production and consumption through the seemingly endless creation of new zones of commodification" (Córdoba Azcárate 2020: 14–15).

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[9] Active and adventure tourism are used as synonyms in the Croatian legislature, and often in the language itself also. In spoken language, it was a very common occurrence that my interlocutors were talking about outdoor activities, but they were actually thinking of adventure activities. This is why I use the terms here without distinction as well.

In 2017 the UN declared the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development, which presented tourism as "a catalyst for effective development because it enhances natural conservation and 'resource efficiency', reverses colonial inequalities, empowers marginalized indigenous people, and builds cross-cultural 'corporate empathy' and 'global prosperity'" (Córdoba Azcárate 2020: 5). A corresponding program proved to be crucial for active tourism in Croatia. In the same year, the Croatian Parliament passed the Act on the Provision of Tourism Services.[10] This Act, among other things, regulates the tourist offer based on the 4H model, which for the first time regulates the tourist services in nautical tourism, health tourism, congress tourism, services of fishing tourism, services on agricultural farms, aquatic organism breeding grounds, hunting, rent-a-car services, diving services and services of active and adventure tourism in Croatia. Although active and adventure tourism services, which by their nature imply numerous risky and life-threatening situations for users, existed before 2017, regulations in this type of tourism only developed slowly. But once it was legally regulated in 2017, the offer of active and adventure tourism content grew exponentially, turning Croatia into an active tourism destination. According to Grand View Research, the adventure tourism market in Europe accounted for a revenue share of around thirty-seven percent of global revenue in 2024, and Croatia is recognised as one of the destinations that increasingly boosts that growth: "countries like France, Austria, and Croatia further bolster the market with their wide array of adventure offerings, including water sports, paragliding, and alpine trekking" (Grand View Research 2024).

However, as Croatia is a small country whose economy is largely based on tourism, concerns about the future directions of tourism development are justified.[11] Among the protected areas, there are eight national parks and twelve nature parks, and another one is currently in the process of being declared.[12] Although the task of such areas is to care for the preservation of biodiversity, destination tourism makes these areas particularly attractive to tourists, and the growth in attendance threatens their basic function. The number of visitors to Croatia's national parks has almost doubled from 2009 to 2019,[13] and the numbers are still growing.

Numerous researchers warn that the very policies of biodiversity and protection also create numerous problematic spots, and I have already mentioned some of them in the second section. For example, Ben Campbell emphasizes that "[a]ttempts to protect nature by control of human intervention in areas demarcated for biodiversity have given rise to difficult questions of practicality and social justice" (2005: 280). The first signs of concern

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[10]
Zakon o pružanju usluga u turizmu. *Narodne novine* 130/2017, issued on 27 December 2017.

[11]
There are 409 protected areas in Croatia, covering a total of 817,383.34 hectares, which makes up 9.3 percent of the total territory of the Republic of Croatia (Ministarstvo gospodarstva n.d.).

[12]
If declared, this park will encompass Ivanščica, Strahinjčica, Maceljska and Ravna gora in the Varaždin and Krapina-Zagorje counties. It will cover thirty-one thousand hectares in fourteen cities and municipalities.

[13]
In 2009 there were a total of 2,060,353, and in 2019 there were 3,876,152 visitors.

for the environment can be interpreted as a response to the effects of industrial and extractive capitalism. The ghettoisation of nature in the form of national parks was intended to maintain the bio-authenticity freed from human intervention. Campbell believes that such solutions led to territorial divisions between nature and society, but did not reduce profitability through ecological degradation (2005: 283). Stanley Stevens (1997) warned of the negative impacts that the establishment of national parks has on the indigenous population. The establishment of parks based on the ideals of wilderness in America has disrupted traditional ways of life and displaced the inhabitants who had shaped and preserved local ecosystems for centuries. Although new types of parks and protected areas under consideration today are based on partnerships with indigenous peoples, the question is to what extent they can contribute to such protection when different interests within indigenous communities come into conflict with each other. In the remainder of this paper, I will mention some examples of these problems in the context of Velebit.

Velebit is often considered Croatia's most awe-inspiring mountain range. In addition to being interesting to researchers due to its biodiversity and geological specificities, Velebit attracts poets, writers and other artists who seek inspiration from it but also create the imagery of Velebit as a mythical, magical mountain. Today, the mountain range encompasses two national parks (NP North Velebit and NP Paklenica) and one nature park (PP Velebit), is part of the European Natura 2000 network, and a UNESCO world heritage site.[14]

All this opens Velebit up to many different users and different (and sometimes conflicting) interpretations. For some, it is a place of contemplation and solitude. Some of my interlocutors choose to spend their leisure time on Velebit to get "away from civilisation", as a response to a busy work week, or due to the feelings of anger and helplessness regarding social and political life in general. And some are going "into the wild" because they believe this is necessary in order to stay physically and mentally healthy. Many of them mentioned that they go to the mountains because they "feel alive" in nature, because by staying in the mountains they are "charging their batteries". A multi-day mountain hiking trip is a deviation from the predictability of everyday life and a boring nine-to-five workday.

But not all these people will go to Velebit on their own. Some lack the skills and knowledge to do it on their own, as one interlocutor explained to me:

> It's not so much the fear of sleeping outside, but the feeling. [In organised mass events] you have people around you, you're not alone if something goes wrong. And you don't know the area, you don't know where you'll be able to sleep, you don't know the terrain, you don't know anything. And I said, we'll go like that [on a mass tour organised by a tourist agency] and we'll see everything, so next time we can do it by ourselves alone. (Viktorija, 48)

14
The beech forests of Paklenica National Park and Northern Velebit National Park were entered onto the UNESCO World Heritage List on 7 July 2017, and together with the beech forests of Albania, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Germany, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Ukraine comprise the whole of the "Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe". Two sites were selected for inclusion on the UNESCO World Heritage List as the Croatian representatives of primeval beech forests, one within the boundaries of Paklenica NP (Suva draga-Klimenta and Oglavinovac-Javornik) and the other within the borders of Northern Velebit NP (Rožanski and Hajdučki kukovi) (Paklenica National Park n.d.).

Therefore, many people take organised and mass tours of Velebit. Such tours enable them to overcome their fears and insecurities stemming from a lack of the necessary knowledge and skills.

Moreover, logistical challenges are often the reason for participating in the organised tours, as well as financial rationale:

> Look, this was our problem: we want it [to go hiking on Velebit], but our problem is logistics. Transportation was expensive, you have transportation to Baške Oštarije and back which is four hundred Croatian Kuna [fifty-three Euro] per person, that was expensive for us. There is no way to put together a team to share these expenses with ... And that's been a problem for years, because we couldn't get the team together. Furthermore, if we went alone, we wouldn't know where to spend the night, and you're a little scared, okay, you're scared. You don't know where to spend the night, you'd never been there. (Ines, 45)

> The next important point is that you get water at check points, they bring you cooked food, you get stew, they bring you beer ... It would have cost us a lot more if we had gone alone. [...] They made it so that anyone directly from an armchair at home has the possibility to come to Velebit, but such people have no idea what they are getting into, these people give up. When we were there, a bunch of them gave up. (Viktorija, 48)

As we can see from these examples, today, due to the entire infrastructure of guides and agencies that have developed around the commodification of natural heritage, people who lack the basic knowledge of how to hike on their own are hiking on Velebit. They generally haven't got any experience of multi-day hiking and they did not go through any kind of training. In other words, they are not independent hikers. But because of its huge popularisation, my interlocutors were somehow allured by this kind of adventure despite the many fears and worries they had.

Since the popularisation of Velebit as an active tourism destination is largely happening through photo and video materials, Velebit has also become attractive in a photogenic sense and some go to Velebit to make memories in the sense of attractive photographs or videos (see Božić-Vrbančić 2025; Bajič 2025). Memories as photographs are an additional way that various commercial programs, ranging from trail and trekking races to mass hiking events, motor rallies and quad tours, attract people to buy their services.

All the various events and different visitors also mean different and conflicting interests and relations between all the agents involved. As a result, the unregulated commodification is leaving a significant ecological footprint on the mountain. According to the information I currently have, there are no restrictions on the number of visitors or the maximum number of participants per event. As one interlocutor mentioned:

> I think all these ministries are not communicating with each other at all. It's not like we've sat down at a table to discuss what to do with this Velebit of ours. For instance, we could decide there will be no vehicles here, no concessions, nothing. Instead, it's left unchecked ... so that nobody knows what's happening. That's the problem. If they don't consider the future of Velebit in the next twenty, thirty, or forty years and come to a joint decision about it, it won't end well. (Marin, 60)

Photo 2: Organised quad tours from Starigrad Paklenica to Velebit. Source: the author's private collection.

Photo 3: An organised quad tour on Velebit, with quad rides venturing off the established paths in a protected area. Source: Pelago n.d.

From the conversations I had with the organisers of some mass events, such as the Highlander hiking program, it appears that even though they sometimes follow the ethics of "leave no trace", they are not fully aware of the impact these events have on the environment. The same goes for the organisers of motor rally races, quad adventures, and concert organisers (Zadarski.hr 2024). Some organisers believe that the biggest threat posed by such events is the garbage left behind by the participants, so they have put in place strict measures in this regard. However, biologists and ornithologists have observed more insidious effects, such as the reduction of plant and animal populations and the disappearance of birds due to the increasing human presence or noise. The organisers of mass outdoor events often do not recognise this as a problem. Therefore, the major challenge is balancing the demands of visitors with the protection of biodiversity, since protected areas face numerous problems including noise that scares the wildlife, crowding, parking problems, air pollution, inconsiderate visitors, trail erosion, visible human waste, wildlife fleeing their habitats, disturbed vegetation, damaged trails and the like (Lindley, Blevins and Williams 2018).[15]

Ultimately, the decision of what to care about and protect is not neutral; not everyone has the power to define what needs protection and care, nor are decisions about what is worth protecting completely innocent or disinterested (Domínguez Rubio 2023). It is therefore crucial to question what we want to preserve and what we do not, to consider the interests involved, and to contemplate the consequences of our decisions.

CONCLUSION

Over the past ten to fifteen years, wilderness exploration and adventure activities have become immensely popular in Croatia. This trend has significantly influenced how Velebit mountain is perceived and integrated into the lives of Croatian residents as well as other visitors. While older generations made Velebit their home from June until October, today's visitors perceive it as an undiscovered wilderness.

The shift happened as adventure tourism started to develop, and as the intertwining of economy and culture is becoming more pronounced in Croatia. In the outdoor adventure framework, mountains represent a space where individuals push their limits, confront their fears and weaknesses, and embark on personal adventures, which makes them attractive places for leisure and adventure activities. The tourism industry is co-constructing this imaginary in order to use it in the commodification of the Velebit mountain range, thereby threatening the area with the irreversible destruction of biodiversity. Protected natural destinations are nowadays becoming increasingly attractive locations for outdoor recreation. Year after year, this leads to an increasing number of visitors and a wider variety of activi-

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[15] Some events contribute to the destruction of cultural heritage without significant repercussions. For instance, the Premužić trail (North Velebit) and Majstorska cesta (South Velebit), both protected cultural monuments, are under threat. One Velebit enthusiast sarcastically commented on several instances of vandalism on the hiking trails on his Facebook profile, noting the lack of action taken in response by the Northern Velebit Park Management. In the case of Majstorska cesta, the lack of regulation in such protected areas has even led to motor rally events taking place there.

ties in these sensitive landscapes. This work has merely scratched the surface of the numerous problematic locations in Croatia that are being exposed to the commodification of its natural resources and the development of adventure tourism, a field of research that requires further in-depth exploration.

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POVZETEK

Članek na podlagi postavke Margaret Rodman, da prostori in njihovi pomeni niso enostavno dani, temveč so dejansko »politizirani družbeni in kulturni konstrukt[i]«, ter misli Matilde Córdoba Azcárate o turizmu kot močni silnici, ki »na osnovi željá, pričakovanj in spominkov« konstruira pomene, obravnava oblikovanje zgodbe o Velebitu kot divjini in izpostavlja njegovo preobrazbo v privlačno lokacijo za aktivni turizem. Opisuje spremembe v predstavitvah Velebita v zadnjih desetih do petnajstih letih, ko se je Hrvaška pomikala v smeri popularizacije aktivnega/pustolovskega turizma in si prizadevala prodreti na turistični trg kot destinacija za tovrstni turizem. Velebit se nenadoma prikazuje kot neokrnjena divjina, kar je nasprotno njegovi hitro pozabljeni zgodovinski stvarnosti, ki jo je zaznamoval živahen soobstoj gorá, pastirjev in njihovih družin.

Prispevek začne z opisom razvoja znanstvenega zanimanja za Velebit v 19. stoletju in pojava planinarjenja na Hrvaškem. Planinci so bili takrat osredotočeni na hidrološke, geološke, biološke in druge značilnosti Velebita. V nadaljevanju članek predstavi diskurzivno produkcijo pustolovstva in njegove povezave z gorami kot prostorom divjine ter opiše, kako se je na Hrvaškem razvijalo zanimanje za pustolovske dejavnosti. Četrti del obravnava sodobne razmere, poblagovljanje narodnih in naravnih parkov na Hrvaškem v okviru aktivnega turizma ter opozarja na številne težave, ki jih porajajo ti procesi.

Capturing the Invisible: The Digital Aestheticization of Mires

Ujeti nevidno: digitalna estetizacija močvirij

Kirsi Laurén, Tiina Seppä and Juhana Venäläinen

ABSTRACT

This article explores how digital devices shape aesthetic perceptions and interactions with fragile Finnish mires. Through senso-digital walking interviews, it examines how technologies like mobile cameras, social media, and navigation apps influence experiences of mires. Digital devices provide new ways to capture and share mire aesthetics and also mediate sensory interactions, allowing users to engage with the mires' visual and ecological nuances. The role of digital tools in nature encounters highlights the evolving relationships between technology, perception, and place.

KEYWORDS: digital aestheticization, mires, multisensory anthropology, nature photography, fragility, affect

IZVLEČEK

Članek raziskuje, kako digitalne naprave vplivajo na estetsko zaznavanje finskih močvirij in interakcije z njimi. Prek čutno-digitalnih sprehajalnih intervjujev preučuje, kako tehnologije, npr. mobilne kamere, družbeni mediji in navigacijske aplikacije, vplivajo na doživljanje močvirij. Digitalne naprave ponujajo nove načine zajemanja in deljenja estetike močvirja z drugimi, hkrati pa so tudi posrednik v senzorični interakciji, ki uporabnikom omogoča dostop do vizualnih in ekoloških nians močvirja. Vloga digitalnih orodij pri srečanjih z naravo nam kaže, kako se razvijajo odnosi med tehnologijo, zaznavanjem in prostorom.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: digitalna estetizacija, močvirje, veččutna antropologija, fotografija narave, krhkost, afekt

INTRODUCTION

We are living in a time when the way we observe the environment is being profoundly transformed by digital technologies and media, which influence our perceptions, ideals, and interactions with the "natural" world. The integration of digital technology adds new dimensions to aesthetic perception, affecting the ways we engage with environments in everyday life as well as in ethnographic praxis (Muršič 2023: ix). Nowadays, nature enthusiasts often bring a variety of digital tools into the wilderness, from smartphones with built-in cameras to GPS devices, fitness trackers, and AI-powered apps designed for identifying birds or plants (Arosuo 2024; Lintuyhdistys Kuikka ry 2023). In the visual domain, drone cameras have opened a novel aerial perspective that offers breathtakingly detailed bird's-eye views otherwise inaccessible to human observers.

In this article, we delve into the digital aestheticization of the Finnish mires, focusing on how digital devices influence human relationships with nature, particularly in terms of visual documentation through photography. In the context of the sensory richness of mires, a two-dimensional visual representation cannot fully capture the immersive experience of being physically present in nature. Even with their limitations, photographs are powerful conveyors of emotions and atmosphere. In contemporary visual culture, where digital photography is ubiquitous, more images of nature are being captured than ever, many of which are also shared and circulated on social media and augmented with tags and location data. However, the allure of nature photography is not unproblematic: the very environments being aesthetically celebrated can become vulnerable to overexposure.

This digital engagement with nature is ambivalent – it can deepen our connection to the environment, but also distance us from the immediate and tangible experience (Santaoja and Peltola 2023). Digital tools can provide new insights into the landscape, thus enriching the aesthetic experience, while these same technologies can also create a buffer between the observer and the natural world, mediating the experience through screens and interfaces. Ironically, the production of the digital devices used to make the aesthetic and ecological value of nature visible is also dependent on rare metals, the mining of which poses a high risk to ecological sustainability in many places in the world.

We focus on two questions: first, how does the use of digital devices influence people's aesthetic perceptions of mires, and second, how do these technologies shape the ways people interact with these environments? The fieldwork has been conducted in two ecologically sensitive peatland areas, the Viiankiaapa mire conservation area in the municipality of Sodankylä in Finnish Lapland and Patvinsuo national park in North Karelia, on the border between Lieksa and Ilomantsi, on Finland's eastern flank (see Figure 1). The research materials include ethnographic walking interviews in these mires, supplemented by digital data gathered during these walks – audio recordings, photographs, videos, and field notes. For the analysis, we engage with theories of environmental aestheticization and affect, particularly delving into how individually experienced sensory perceptions are entangled with shared cultural understandings.[1]

1

The themes of this article, based on the same material, have previously been discussed in Finnish in an article published in December 2024 (Laurén and Seppä 2024).

Photo 1: Map of the fieldwork research sites (Map base: OpenStreetMap)

Our approach, rooted in ethnography and environmental humanities, emphasizes digitality both as an object of study and as a methodological tool in multiple ways. First, digitality forms a key dimension of the nature relationships we are investigating. Second, we use body-worn digital cameras during the walks, allowing us to capture the participants' sensory interactions. Finally, our aim has been to develop a methodological perspective of *senso-digital walks*, where experimentation with mobile and wearable technologies is especially encouraged by the researchers and is a subject of discussion with the research participants.

AMBIGUOUS AND FRAGILE MIRES

Mires have historically covered nearly one-third of Finland's land area. The boreal coniferous forests as well as cool and humid summers create the perfect hydrological conditions in which rainfall exceeds the rate of evapotranspiration, trapping moisture in the soil. High water content slows down the rate of organic matter decomposition, leading to the gradual accumulation of peat (Sarkkola and Päivänen 2020).

For humans, mires can be a challenging terrain. Their soggy surface and the difficulty of traversing them have historically made mires seem hostile. Yet people have long ventured into the mires to hunt and pick berries. In recent decades, along with the growing popularity of national parks, mires have become destinations for outdoor recreation. This shift has been accompanied by a broader cultural reappraisal of mires, which are now celebrated for their unique aesthetic and experiential qualities. Increasingly, their protection is advocated through art, and they have even become the stage for community-centred, carnival-like sporting events (Laurén 2006; Laurén, Kaukio and Latvala-Harvilahti 2023; Laurén, Latvala-Harvilahti and Kaukio 2022).

Today mires are widely recognised as ecosystems that are essential for combating climate change and biodiversity loss, but they are especially fragile. Human activities – agriculture, forestry, and peat extraction – have impacted a large part of Finland's mires. Their drainage by digging ditches intensified rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s, and ended only in the 1990s after more than half of the country's mires had already been drained. In recent decades, increasing efforts have been made to restore the drained peatlands by blocking ditches, with the goal of restoring mires to their natural state (Aapala, Similä and Penttinen 2013).

Culturally, mires have been viewed with a certain unease. Instead of beauty, they have evoked fear, conjuring associations even with death, disease, and horror (Giblett 1996: 3; Saito 1999: 121). Mires have been imagined as infinitely deep and otherworldly, linked to the afterlife or the supernatural. In Finnish folklore, they are often haunted places, inhabited by spirits and hidden dangers. *Will-o'-the-wisps,* those eerie flickering lights, are said to hover above treasure hidden deep within the bog, and those who wander too far may hear the cries of children secretly buried in watery graves. Such evocative imageries reflect the uncanny cultural heritage of mires as landscapes of dread, as places where humans lose control and might vanish (Knuuttila 1999; Laaksonen 1995, 2008; Laurén 2006: 98–108; Lehtinen 1999).

FIELDWORK SITES

The Viiankiaapa mire, part of Finland's Mire Protection Program and the EU's Natura 2000 network, is safeguarded for its ecological value and as a vital bird habitat. In spite of this, the British multinational mining company Anglo American has been pursuing plans to extract valuable minerals from the area for a long time. The mining project "Sakatti", planned since 2011, has seen exploratory drilling escalate in recent years. There has been controversy surrounding the mine for over a decade, with many suggesting it could set a crucial precedent for the fate of Natura 2000 sites across Europe. The topic loomed large during our interviews at Viiankiaapa in the autumn of 2023, often popping up spontaneously during the hikes. Consequently, the aesthetic reflection of Viiankiaapa is inevitably entangled with its uncertain future. This mire is now a site of heightened affective tension, intensified by art and activism that advocates for its protection, extensive media coverage, and the mining company's heightened security measures within the protected area (see Kiuru and Helle 2022; Latvala-Harvilahti 2021; Nuutinen-Kallio 2024; Yle 2011, 2013, 2024). As a recrea-

tional site, Viiankiaapa doesn't attract particularly large numbers of visitors but is rather a local nature destination, which highlights a certain tension between carefree day hiking and the potential for ecological disaster due to the mining plans.

Like Viiankiaapa, Patvinsuo is a Natura 2000 protected mire of international importance. Established as a national park in 1982, it protects mires, forests, and water environments, and forms part of the North Karelia Biosphere Reserve. It also plays an important role in the international efforts to protect waterfowl and shorebirds (Ympäristö.fi n. d.a). With around 16,000 visitors annually, Patvinsuo is one of Finland's smallest national parks in the number of visits, which is at least partly explained by its peripheral location on Finland's eastern flank.

Both Viiankiaapa and Patvinsuo are delicate ecosystems, valued for their beauty and biodiversity. Their protected status aims to preserve these environments as close to their original state as possible for future generations. In these areas, human impact is carefully managed through infrastructure such as duckboards,[2] shelters, and signposts, which facilitate recreational use while protecting sensitive species and reducing harm to the environment (Laurén 2014).

Photo 2: The research interviews were mostly conducted while walking on duckboards
(Author: Kirsi Laurén. Patvinsuo, 25 September 2023)

[2]
Duckboards are narrow wooden pathways, typically one or two planks wide, commonly used in Finnish mires to help hikers traverse peatlands without damaging the sensitive ecosystem or sinking into the soft ground.

Our research material for this article comprises of 12 senso-digital walks conducted in Patvinsuo and Viiankiaapa in 2023–2024, supplemented by three expert interviews conducted indoors and/or remotely.[3] The research participants included both recreational visitors and people who have engaged with these sites through their profession. We used the snowball method to recruit participants, gathering recommendations from previous interviewees (see Grönfors and Vilkka 2011: 96–97) and also directly approaching hikers who were active on social media sites. Although the participants came from a variety of educational and professional backgrounds, and were of different ages (34–76), they shared a deep connection to and admiration of these environments. The professionals we spoke with included wilderness guides, park infrastructure managers, conservation biologists, and a communications specialist.

Walking interviews, particularly sensory ones, are widely used in ethnographic research to explore people's place-based experiences and their shifting sensory environments (e.g. Aula 2018; Ingold and Vergunst 2008; Järviluoma and Murray 2023; Ojanen 2018; Pink 2007). In our study, the researchers walked with and behind the interlocutors, engaging in open-ended conversations to elicit sensory memories and experiences (cf. Venäläinen 2023). During the walks, we focused on the ways of perceiving nature, interacting with it, and the use of digital tools. Discussion revolved, for example, around the participants' hiking routines, their use of digital devices to document the experience, and their habits around taking and sharing photographs – whether for personal memories, social media, or private networks.

Photo 3: One researcher also carried a handheld recorder because the body camera did not always capture the interviewer's voice clearly (Author: Tiina Seppä. Viiankiaapa, 9 September 2023)

[3] The research material consists of 15 interviews conducted in the context of the DigiFREN research project in 2023–2024. The data is held by the research project.

Our walking interviews typically lasted between one and four hours, shaped in part by the terrain of these expansive mires, where trails are long, and resting points like lean-to shelters offer opportunities for pauses and conversation. Generally, the interlocutor led the way, choosing the route, while the situation was documented using a body camera strapped to the participant's chest. To ensure high-quality audio, one researcher also carried a handheld recorder because the body camera did not always capture the researchers' voices clearly. Given the remote nature of these areas, a lunch break was often necessary, and interviews frequently ran over our planned time, uncovering topics we had not anticipated.

The body camera added a unique dimension to our data, capturing not only the surrounding environment but also the digital interactions taking place between the interlocutor and their devices. As with any recording device, the footage also reveals what otherwise easily remains unnoticed: the weather, the terrain, and the flow of conversation that all influence the experience (see Ojanen 2018).

To analyse the research material, we employed a combination of inductive and concept-driven qualitative content analysis (e.g. Schreier 2012), focusing on how digital technologies influence aesthetic engagement with mires. We explored digitally mediated nature experiences through the lens of aestheticization and affect.

AESTHETIC AND AFFECTIVE MIRES

Mire environments have long been overshadowed by the more "sublime" and canonised Finnish landscapes of lakes and forests. It wasn't until the turn of the 21st century that the aesthetic value of mires began to gain broader recognition both in Finland and globally (Hakala 1999; Sepänmaa 1999). Despite Finland's unique status as one of the most peatland-rich countries relative to its land area, not a single mire has been designated a "national landscape"[4].

Historically, appreciation for peatlands was primarily rooted in their utility – the affordances of berries, game, timber, or peat – rather than their visual appeal. Again, when drained and converted into farmland or used for forestry and peat extraction, peatlands were valued for their direct material benefits to humans. Today, as awareness of the environmental crisis grows, the perspective on peatlands has changed drastically. Climate change has drawn attention to the role of mires as vital carbon stores, carbon sinks and biodiversity havens, simultaneously reshaping how we *view* these landscapes. Mires, once dismissed as aesthetically unremarkable, are being reframed as places of intrinsic ecological beauty. In media coverage on peatlands, the beautiful aerial photographs made possible by drone technology present the mire landscape almost like an abstract work of art, where the enchanting colours and countless details celebrate the ecological diversity of these environments (see e.g. Elonen 2024).

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[4] National landscapes are cultural symbols celebrated for their aesthetic or historical significance, and mires, while present in certain regions like North Karelia's hill villages and the Pallastunturi area in Lapland, have traditionally not been included in this category (Ympäristö.fi n.d. b).

Aesthetics, in its everyday meaning, relates to the human experience of beauty and harmony. The term is rooted in the Greek *aisthētikós*, meaning "pertaining to perception." Thus, aesthetics is about more than just visual pleasure: it encompasses a bodily and multi-sensory engagement with the world (Berleant 2015; Mikkonen 2024). Although an individual sensory experience – whether visual, auditory, olfactory or tactile – can evoke aesthetic satisfaction, true aesthetic appreciation arises from the interplay of the senses (Berleant 1999: 16–17).

In Western post-industrial societies, an emphasis on aesthetics has grown across various domains of life (Naukkarinen 2000: 133). Two lines of thought stand out in discussions of *aestheticization* within environmental aesthetics: one claims that appreciating nature aesthetically requires scientific understanding, while the other emphasizes direct, embodied engagement with the environment (see e.g. Mikkonen 2017: 16–23). In our approach, we are not thinking only of the current technological possibilities (from highly capable mobile phone cameras to affordable consumer drones) for creating stunning visual imagery, but also the more strictly etymological sense of how the modes of perceiving the world change at the same time, as well as the fluctuating relations between media technologies, environments, and sensory experiences (see Tiainen 2023).

In our research, which employs senso-digital walking as a method, we engage physically with nature: walking on the narrow and wobbly duckboards, but also stopping to touch plants, inhaling different scents, tasting berries, listening to the birds and the soft squelch of the boggy ground beneath our feet, sitting on tussocks, duckboards or beside a campfire. Through such embodied interaction, we physically take part in the landscape, and this participation evidently shapes how we perceive and appreciate its aesthetic qualities. Nature, in turn, influences our movements: the length of our strides, the pace of our walk, the direction of our gaze, and even the moments we choose for photography or for opening a mobile application to identify a plant. This kind of engagement reveals the aesthetic aspects of nature that might remain unnoticed when viewed from a distance or from the perspective of a detached observer (Kupfer 2003: 77–78).

Aesthetic experiences are deeply intertwined with emotions and sensations, which are inseparably linked to our relationships with nature and culture. Sensory experiences not only connect us to the material world but also to the social world (Howes 2003: xi). Our bodily experiences are never purely physical; they carry cultural meanings and associations (Vannini, Waskul and Gottschalk 2012: 6, 130). Unconscious gut feelings – what we refer to as affects – precede and shape emotions, thoughts, and actions (Massumi 1995; Rinne, Kajander and Haanpää 2020: 6). In the research walks, it was these subtle, pre-verbal sensations that surfaced most strongly, rather than clearly articulated emotions.

Affect is often portrayed as a precursor to emotion. It is less culturally shaped and harder to put into words than the named, verbalised emotions we typically recognise (Wetherell 2012). While emotions are identified through a shared vocabulary and an assumption of a certain level of universality and commensurability ("everyone knows what it means to feel sad"), affects are much more ambiguous, lacking a predetermined meaning or interpretation, and having a potential for unexpected outcomes. Affect is not a stable construct, but

more a kind of a sudden pulsation that emerges when being exposed to unpredictable stimuli from the environment. In fact, affect plays a crucial role in perception (Massumi 1995). For example, the sensations stirred by a visual encounter may contradict the more structured emotion that follows once we interpret and articulate it. As Brian Massumi notes, the initial reaction to visual stimuli – i.e. the affect – can precede and even conflict with the emotions generated by our later, more conscious interpretations (Massumi 1995). It is a force that moves us, even if we cannot always fully name or express it.

In the context of mires, affects are often verbalised through the sensations of freedom or relaxation. Sometimes, mires can also give rise to more articulated emotions, such as fear. Fear, according to Sara Ahmed, is not something that simply "happens" in the body; it is a social and cultural construct, a mediated emotion, and a tool of control (Ahmed 2014 [2004]: 69). Mires have long been the subject of such fears, often seen as dangerous and foreboding spaces where the unpredictable depth can instil a lingering unease. Although our study participants did not express such explicit fears, the latent fear of sinking into a mire was present in our conversations, if only through negation (Laurén 2006: 98–101).

SENSING (ON) THE DUCKBOARDS

The watery abundance of mires shapes not only how one moves through the mire but also the nature of digital observation, particularly in the choice of photographic subjects. During our fieldwork, especially at Patvinsuo mire, water was ever-present, sometimes so much so that parts of the trails and the duckboards were submerged beneath it. We often found ourselves searching for higher, drier ground, leaping from tussock to tussock to avoid newly formed pools. On the interview recordings, one can hear the wet splashing sounds of our walk and the squelch of the saturated soil. Sometimes the water wasn't just underfoot – it found its way into our shoes, too. In this way, our bodily engagement with the mire was deeply intimate, with the water and peat soil becoming part of our sensory experience.

In the mires, water and moisture are the key elements that awaken the senses, creating a distinctive smellscape – one can often smell the mire long before it comes into view. Certain plants, like northern Labrador tea (*Rhododendron tomentosum*), are frequently mentioned in our interviews as typical of this environment, their scent filling the air with a pungent aroma that clings to the senses. Humid moss and the layers of peat formed from decomposition also stand out for their distinct texture underfoot. These sensory encounters – intertwined with movement, physical sensation, and sensory memory – were typically enjoyed and described in positive terms by our interlocutors (see also Kaukio 2022; Piirainen and Laurén 2023).

In one of the walks in the spring of 2023, while transitioning from a forested section of Patvinsuo to the open expanse of the mire on duckboards, the interlocutor's attention immediately shifted to the intensified odours of the humid mire air:

It's the odour that comes from it, and it's so intoxicating at times [...]. The odour of the mire is the first thing that hits you, that gives you the initial impact. [...] And as we move from the forest to the duckboards out here, you can smell it more because it's wetter here. [...] Then, after that, comes the sense of wilderness. (Wilderness guide, Patvinsuo, P1)

Although vision is often privileged in Western cultures, scent was frequently highlighted in our interviews as a key element of the mire's sensory landscape. The particular odour of the mire was repeatedly described as "intoxicating" and was often the first thing noted when entering these environments. The scent was not only a source of pleasure but also a central part of the mire's aesthetic appeal (see also Laurén and Piirainen 2022: 32). As hikers moved along the duckboards, scents would intensify or fade, depending on the moisture levels in the ground, the plants nearby, and the weather conditions.

H1: It's lovely here...
H2: Yeah, this is one of those... this scent, it's not like...
H1: This is it.
H2: The scent of the mire.
H1: The scent of the mire. It's always, whenever I come here...
H2: Yeah, in summer...
H1: When you have a keen sense of smell, it's...
H2: In the summer, when it's hot, it's even stronger, but now with the wind, it blows it away. But in summer, when it's warm, it's...
H1: But now the colours of autumn are starting to show...
H2: The scent here is really intoxicating.
(Hikers 1 and 2, joint interview, Viiankiaapa, V6)

In the previous exchange, we see how scent and sight work together in the mire. The hikers begin with the olfactory experience, which then triggers a shift to the changing colours of autumn. This interplay of the senses is central to the aesthetic experience of mires, even though only the visual can be captured in a photograph. When focusing solely on the visual, as in a photograph, there's a risk of distancing oneself from the full sensory immersion that the mire environment offers (Lehari 2005: 98). On the other hand, the obviously unisensory appearance of a photograph might be understood as a reminiscence and a sort of a memento of the multifaceted sensory experience in situ – which is curiously also something that can be shared and that people wish to share online with others who have experienced something similar (cf. the discussion on "likenessing" in Pöllänen 2023).

While no one in our interviews mentioned recording sounds or taking videos that captured both sound and image, it was clear that being physically present in the mire and responding to the researchers' questions brought the multisensory aesthetic dimension of these spaces to the fore. The interlocutors noted the limitations of photographs, particularly when it came to capturing smells. They remarked that while social media posts featuring mire landscapes could evoke memories of the scent for those already familiar with mires, the actual olfactory experience remained beyond the reach of an image. However, on platforms like Instagram, captions, comments and hashtags can help convey a sense of the mire atmosphere, enriching the image with sensory cues that go beyond sight alone.

Describing scents, along with other sensory experiences, has long played a significant role in travel narratives, even before the age of visual documentation (Kostiainen et al. 2004: 152). This focus on odour persists today, including in the verbal depictions that accompany social media images of mires. The moisture of a mire – and the distinct scents it generates – sets this environment apart from others. The absence of drainage keeps the mire wet, preserving the low vegetation and maintaining what is considered the mire's natural state.

What do people photograph in mires, then? Mires, like oceans, plains, and deserts, often captivate through their vastness, the rhythmic patterns within the landscape, and the expanse of sky stretching above them (Sepänmaa 1999: 11). At the same time, the open and flat landscapes can be difficult objects of photography, as they often lack specific focal points which would immediately catch the eye and attention. For this reason, the "Instagramma-bility" (e.g. Arts et al. 2021) of mires depends on the reproduction of subtle nuances, for example, in experiencing the colours of the landscape. Most of our interviews took place in early autumn, as the first signs of seasonal colour changes were beginning to appear. Our interviewees frequently paused to capture the vibrant yellows and reds of the mire, with the duckboards extending into the distance catching their attention.

Footage from the body cameras worn by the interviewees shows that pauses were prompted not only by the picturesque views but also by the materiality of the duckboards. Wider sections provided natural stopping points where hikers could take out their phones and snap a photo, and simultaneously to give way to oncoming hikers when necessary. In this way, the duckboards and phone cameras became integral parts of the experience, encouraging moments of stillness and reflection. Without these elements, the hike would likely have continued uninterrupted (cf. Aula 2018).

When asked what specifically drew them to photograph certain subjects, many interviewees found it difficult to articulate exactly what fascinated them about a particular view or scene. This highlights the affective, emotional quality of aesthetic experiences in nature, which are not easily reducible to a single sensation or observation in general (cf. Wetherell 2012), but especially not in the case of open mire landscapes. The beauty of nature often blends reality with imagination and creativity, especially for those, like visual artists, who see the mire as a space for passionate expression. As one interlocutor explained:

> The emptiness, or maybe something like that… The autumn colours aren't that impressive this time. I expected more. I can't really explain it, but there's that… Like with the last three pieces I did, especially the one where there's nothing but grass [gestures toward the vast mire], there's really nothing there. But I painted it with such passion. (Visual artist, Patvinsuo, P5)

While mires often captivate through their expansive views, they also offer intimate details – plants, insects, and mosses – that can be closely observed when stepping off the duckboards. However, in national parks, visitors are required to stay on the designated paths to protect the sensitive ecosystems. On Instagram, images of dogs on the duckboards are common, though

their leashes may not always be visible. Some hikers edit the leashes out of their photos, considering them an aesthetic distraction (Expert, A3), even if the park regulations or the code of conduct require keeping dogs on a leash. The interlocutors noted that they rarely took selfies, focusing instead on photographing their dogs, which often appear in picturesque spots within the mire:[5]

> Yeah, when my dog is with me on those maintenance trips, I think I mostly end up taking pictures of it, you know, sitting on top of a shelter or somewhere else. (Maintenance worker, Patvinsuo, P4)

At Viiankiaapa, a popular subject for photos is Viiankijärvi, a lake often viewed from afar, with waterfowl frequently visible from the duckboards. As hikers proceeded from the forested areas onto the mire, the expansive views often prompted them to take out their phones and start photographing. Pauses for pictures were common, especially at scenic spots or when interesting plants or animals caught their eye (see also Ojanen 2018).

Although duckboards, marked trails, and other infrastructure alter the landscape, they also facilitate aesthetic observation and engagement with these challenging environments. Duckboards make it possible to immerse oneself in the mire, allowing access to areas that would otherwise be inaccessible. These human-made paths are not simply practical structures: they shape how the mire is experienced and photographed. Duckboards are a symbol that makes the mires recognisable in the photographs. As one interlocutor put it, without the duckboards, a mire might just resemble any other field:

> It's really tricky to get that "wow" shot with a mire. It's much easier with old-growth forests or fells. Like, in Pyhä-Luosto National Park, there's that subarctic mire (tunturiaapa) with the duckboards leading towards the fell, so it's easy to get that dramatic shot. (Expert, A1)

Duckboards provide a relatively solid platform for capturing detailed images of the mire without the risk of sinking into the wet ground. While walking across the mire, one must keep moving to avoid becoming stuck in the peat. On the duckboards, however, one can stop, stand, or even sit or lie down without worry, allowing for deeper engagement with the mire, both visually and through digital devices.

While duckboards protect sensitive mire ecosystems from excessive foot traffic, they also expose these environments to increased human presence. In conservation areas like Patvinsuo and Viiankiaapa, both cultural and ecological values are significant. The goal is to balance public access with environmental protection, ensuring that people can experience and appreciate these landscapes while learning to value conservation efforts. As an expert interviewee involved in planning the routes explained:

> It's important that people can come here, experience this for themselves, and through that, learn to appreciate it. There are health benefits, too, and it raises awareness about conservation. We can't just say people shouldn't come here because it's too valuable. (Expert, A3)

[5]
Our analysis of the social media imagery of the fieldwork sites supports the same observation: in a computer vision-based categorisation of ca. seven thousand photos from the Patvinsuo National Park, only two percent of the images were clustered in the category identified as selfies. See Venäläinen, submitted for review.

During our walks, many hikers expressed a preference for weathered, old duckboards, which they found more visually appealing than the newer metal grates or gravel paths that have been introduced in some of the most frequently visited national parks (see Korhonen 2015). The aging wooden structures seem to blend better into the environment, becoming part of the landscape over time and gradually shedding the signs of extraneous human intervention. In contrast, metal duckboards – while more durable and better-suited for the growing popularity of mountain biking and e-biking – are often seen as *aesthetically* too modern and out of place in these natural settings, even if they increase the accessibility of the routes for hikers and reduce the wear on the terrain.

NAVIGATING SAFELY

In narrations of experiencing mire environments, experiences of getting lost are often mentioned, as well as the fear it evokes and respect for the mire's unpredictability. In these situations, the environment, which is ordinarily perceived as aesthetic, relaxing, and unique, takes on a threatening and unfamiliar character, as is typical in experiences of getting lost (Knuuttila 2003: 143). Digital devices and applications are thought to enhance safety during outdoor activities, and at times, the interviewees report that even their relatives have encouraged them to use these tools.

Digital maps and location apps provide additional safety even for experienced navigators and nature enthusiasts. Especially in wet and challenging terrain, map apps offer information about the area and can help with route selection. A GPS device helps to pinpoint one's exact location:

> Interviewer (I): So, is the GPS more of a safety device for you?
> Hiker (H): Yes, it's a safety device.
> I: Right, to help you find your way back?
> H: Yes, and I can use it to estimate distances. It's on the map, but it's still quite hard to follow where exactly you are. (Hiker, Viiankiaapa, V2)

Digital devices that aid navigation can help avoid getting wet or extending travel time, allowing for more relaxed movement and enjoyment of nature. However, the challenges of digital devices include limited battery life and constrained network coverage in remote areas, which is why longer trips still require a traditional compass and paper map as backup (see also Talvensuu 2021: 117–118; Santaoja and Peltola 2023: 15–16). Once someone has been lost in the wilderness, their attitude toward digital mapping services tends to become more positive. As one of our interviewees who frequently visits mires remarked:

> Well, after my friend and I... four years ago, the police had to come find us in the forest where we were hunting chanterelles in the middle of the night. Since then, yes, I've used [map services] thankfully. (Visual artist, Patvinsuo, P5)

Many interviewees also mentioned using various apps for species identification through photos or recordings (e.g. Muuttolintujen kevät n.d.). The interviews frequently

highlighted the idea that knowledge about natural phenomena, such as species identification, enhances the experience of enjoying nature. More generally, our interlocutors often emphasized their knowledge-based relationship with the environment (see also Kaukio 2022). They frequently mentioned the convenience of species identification apps, which replace the need for bulky nature guides that they would have carried with them during their hikes before the era of smartphones (Hiker, Viiankiaapa, V2). A profound understanding of the biological characteristics of the mire can also significantly aid navigation through this complex environment:

> There are these specific bog trails that lead to Sakattikumpu or Petäjäsaari. They can break off, and then you have to... turn back and try the next one, see if it gets you where you want to go. And then, of course, knowledge of botany helps; if there's string sedge [*Carex chordorrhiza*], it might hold because its roots are strong and dense, and if there's enough bogbee [*Menyanthes trifoliata*], it forms a kind of cushion. Not everyone knows bogbee well enough to say, "Yeah, I can walk on this." (Hiker, Viiankiaapa, V3)

Seasonal changes in the mire drastically affect how people move through it. In the winter, the experience of freedom is often highlighted. Frozen mires allow for skiing with forest skis[6] across areas that are impassable in summer, and the duckboards, which guide summer visitors, no longer limit or dictate routes. Skiers can glide wherever they please, though meal breaks are typically taken at designated campfire sites. Equipment is also easier to transport in winter, especially when the snow crust is firm enough to pull supplies on a sled rather than carry them:

> For me, there's never been a particular season that stands out as the absolute best – each has its own advantages. Every season brings something amazing, moving, or remarkable. Like in early spring, you can ski to places that are inaccessible in summer because the open mire is too wet. (Visual artist, Viiankiaapa, V3)

We conducted one winter interview on skis at Patvinsuo in early April 2024. There was still plenty of snow, but it was melting rapidly as the day went on. Despite the snow cover, restrictions to protect nesting birds meant we had to stay on the duckboards, which limited the freedom typically associated with mire visits in winter. As the day progressed, the snow supporting our skis softened, and our poles started to sink through it. At our lunch spot at the Teretti lean-to shelter, water pooled around us, making it difficult to start a fire in the middle of what felt like a pond.

One particularly interesting aesthetic observation from this skiing interview was related to the duckboards. While the old boards lay hidden beneath the snow, planks for a new section of the trail had been placed on top of the snow crust, awaiting installation in the spring. Captured on a phone camera, these planks appeared distorted, almost broken, offering a curious and unusual variation on the classic mire landscape (see Figure 4).

6

Forest skis are long and wide cross-country skis designed for traversing deep, untouched snow without sinking.

Photo 4: Screenshot from the body camera footage during the skiing interview, Patvinsuo mire, 9 April 2024

CONCLUSION

Technological mediations of nature are not merely "re"-presentations of nature that come after the fact, but more and more they are becoming an integral part of our "natural" capabilities of how we engage with the sensory richness of the world. What captivates mire visitors time and again, and what they seek to capture through photography, is the overwhelming sense of vastness in the flat and open environment. The endless duckboards stretching into the distance, the treeless expanse, and the boundless feeling of space invite the mire visitor to pause and take a photo.

The impulse to digitally capture the vastness of the mires speaks to a similar aesthetic yearning as watching a lake or ocean horizon, yet the distinct dampness of the peat, the water, the characteristic mire vegetation, the smells, sounds, and tactile sensations combine to offer a unique, multi-sensory experience, which can only be hinted at in the photographic representations. For the mire regulars that we interviewed, Patvinsuo and Viiankiaapa mires hold a dual significance: they are both familiar and special, revisited across seasons, for both work and leisure. The act of photographing emphasizes the mire's uniqueness and the attentiveness required to continuously rediscover its aesthetic appeal. At the same time, photographs serve as personal keepsakes and reminders of special moments in nature.

While mires often evoke positive sensations and feelings – such as a sense of relaxation and connection with nature – they can also stir up fear, which is rooted in folklore about people sinking into mires or getting lost, and more tangible dangers, like the unpredictability of snow and ice. Digital technologies intersect with these experiences: fears are mitigated by the reassurance of being able to call for help or navigate using map apps, while

aesthetic experiences are captured and shared through digital photography, either on social media or within more private circles.

In our research walks, a knowledge-based, cognitively grounded appreciation of mire aesthetics recurringly emerged. Acquaintance with the mire ecosystems and characteristic species often seemed to be an underlying assumption in the discussions, sometimes even in the form of implicitly questioning our credibility as researchers to delve into mire aesthetics and the related culture of outdoors recreation without the proper (biological) expertise. According to the view that underlines the cognitive element in nature aesthetics, knowledge of mire species and habitats enhances the aesthetic experience, turning it into something deeper, more layered, and more intensively affective. Contemporary relationships with mires are also characterised by an ecological and ethical consciousness, intertwined with feelings of enjoyment and a sense of community (Laurén, Kaukio and Latvala-Harvilahti 2023; see also Hankonen 2021: 225–228).

The allure of mires is often described as a hard-to-define affective experience – something elusive and not always tied to conscious thought, let alone conclusive scientific explanation. Mires evoke sensations that resist easy articulation: the smell of moist soil, the expansive view, the play of light, and the sense of space, all of which are regularly mentioned in our interviews. The phone camera becomes an unobtrusive tool for capturing these fleeting moments, merging seamlessly with the aesthetic experience. Based on our material, it seems clear that digital photography has become an integral part of the human relationship with nature.

The multisensory richness of the mire experience is evident throughout our research. Although our questions initially focused on visual aesthetics, other sensory dimensions quickly became central –especially smell, which emerged as an essential feature that cannot be captured by photography. This multisensory aspect, combined with the difficulty of verbally describing the mire experience, underscores the affective power of the environment.

The act of walking itself also highlights the affective nature of being in the mire. With its deep cultural resonances, the mire is an inherently affective place – emotionally charged both in terms of individual experiences and collective societal discourses. Once considered marginal, both aesthetically and geographically, mires have recently gained prominence, propelled by issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and the EU's restoration regulations.[7] Moreover, mires have become a flashpoint in debates around the ecologically and societally acceptable uses of natural resources. For example, the proposed Sakatti mine in Viiankiaapa mire has become a highly contentious issue, stirring emotions and societal discussions that link mire environments to broader questions of sustainability, ecology, and even mythology. Despite these diverse and sometimes conflicting narratives, what remains at the core is the essence of these mires: they are vital habitats, supporting a vast range of species from fungi to frogs, whose survival is intricately tied to these fragile ecosystems.

[7]
The EU's Nature Restoration Law came into force in August 2024 and aims to restore ecosystems, habitats, and species across EU land for the purposes of biodiversity recovery and mitigating climate change. See European Commission n.d.

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INTERVIEWS

Expert interviews:

A1: 11. 9. 2023, Rovaniemi. Special expert in nature conservation. Interviewers: Tiina Seppä and Juhana Venäläinen, duration 1 hour

A2: 17. 10. 2023, Joensuu. Expert. Interviewers: Tiina Seppä and Juhana Venäläinen. Duration 1 hour

A3: 30. 11. 2023, Joensuu, remote interview. Special expert in communications. Interviewers: Tiina Seppä and Juhana Venäläinen. Duration 1 hour

Walking interviews in Patvinsuo:

P1: 21. 8. 2023. Wilderness guide, b. 1975. Interviewers: Kirsi Laurén, Tiina Seppä, and Juhana Venäläinen. Duration approx. 5 hours

P2: 15. 9. 2023. Biologist, b. 1971. Interviewers: Kirsi Laurén and Tiina Seppä. Duration approx. 2.5 hours

P3: 25. 9. 2023. Hiker, b. 1961. Interviewers: Juhana Venäläinen and Sanni Puustinen. Duration approx. 2.5 hours

P4: 25. 9. 2023. Maintenance worker, b. 1981. Interviewers: Tiina Seppä and Kirsi Laurén. Duration 1 hour 15 minutes

P5: 22. 9. 2023. Visual artist, b. 1944. Interviewer: Kirsi Laurén. Duration approx. 3 hours

P6 (skiing): 9. 4. 2024. Hiker, b. 1982. Interviewers: Tiina Seppä and Juhana Venäläinen. Duration 4 hours

Walking interviews in Viiankiaapa:

V1: 8. 9. 2023. Hiker (and dog), b. 1989. Interviewers: Kirsi Laurén and Tiina Seppä. Duration approx. 3 hours

V2: 8. 9. 2023. Hiker, b. 1969. Interviewers: Juhana Venäläinen and Sanni-Maaria Puustinen. Duration approx. 3 hours

POVZETEK

Članek raziskuje vlogo digitalnih tehnologij pri estetskem dojemanju in doživljanju finskih močvirij, krhkih ekosistemov z bogato biodiverziteto. S pomočjo intervjujev, opravljenih na čutno-digitalnih sprehodih v naravnih parkih Viiankiaapa in Patvinsuo, proučuje, kako mobilne kamere, družbena omrežja in navigacijske aplikacije oblikujejo način našega dojemanja in interaktiranja s temi okolji. Te tehnologije uporabniku in uporabnicam omogočajo dokumentiranje in deljenje estetskih ter ekoloških značilnosti močvirij, ob tem pa usmerjajo njihovo čutno delovanje, ki vodi bodisi v poglabljanje povezanosti z naravo bodisi odmikanje od nje. Raziskava na podlagi sprehajalnih intervjujev z dokumentiranjem čutnih izkušenj – vizualnih, vonjav in zvokov – ugotavlja, kako udeleženke in udeleženci na pohodih uporabljajo digitalna orodja. Analiza je pokazala, da digitalno usmerjanje krepi estetsko doživljanje, vendar pa vpliva tudi na dojemanje in včasih povzroča odmik od neposredne, utelešene interakcije. Študija se ukvarja z vprašanjem, kako digitalna orodja ustvarjajo afektne odzive, kot sta sprostitev ali nelagodje, in prispevajo k uživanju močvirnih okolij, osnovano na poznavanju.

Razprava se prav tako dotakne širših družbenih in okoljskih razsežnosti močvirij, vključno z izzivi ohranjanja, vplivi rudarstva in tehnološkim upravljanjem narave. Članek prikazuje, kako tehnologije, kot so aplikacije za prepoznavanje vrst in digitalna fotografija, ne le dokumentirajo izkušnje, temveč tudi dejavno oblikujejo človeške odnose z naravnim svetom.

Prispevek sklene, da digitalne tehnologije s ponujanjem novih načinov občudovanja in varovanja občutljivih ekosistemov na novo opredeljujejo človeške interakcije z naravo. Ta raziskava s spajanjem vizualne, čutne in ekološke razsežnosti osvetljuje dinamično sovplivanje tehnologije, dojemanja in prostora ter spodbuja debate o digitalizaciji izkušanja narave.

Fragile Sustainability or Sustainable Fragility? Local Understanding of Global Terms in the Logar Valley

Krhka trajnostnost ali trajnostna krhkost? Lokalno razumevanje globalnih pojmov v Logarski dolini

Ana Svetel and Veronika Zavratnik

ABSTRACT

This article explores the materialisations of sustainability in the Logar Valley, an Alpine tourist destination in Slovenia. Drawing on ethnographic research, we examine how sustainability is understood and enacted by local tourism service providers, highlighting four key themes: food practices, the temporalities of tourism, transport, and environmental care. We argue that the local perceptions of sustainability, fragility, and tradition, especially when understood in the context of tourism, function as closely interlinked emic concepts. They serve as a tool or discursive strategy according to which the various actors in Solčavsko position themselves within the multiplicity of social relations between us and them, past and future, nature and culture, tradition and innovation, good and bad. They can thus be understood as socially acceptable tools used by the actors to express their interests in a way that makes these interests appear as "objective", "rational" or "universally valid" truths.
KEYWORDS: environment, temporality, care, transport, food, tourism, Logar Valley

IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava materializacijo trajnostnosti v Logarski dolini, alpski turistični destinaciji v Sloveniji. Na podlagi etnografskih raziskav preučuleva, kako trajnostni razvoj razumejo in izvajajo lokalni turistični ponudniki, pri čemer izpostavljava štiri ključne teme: prehranjevalne prakse, časovne značilnosti turizma, prevoz in z njim povezano infrastrukturo ter skrb

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za okolje. Ugotavljaja, da lokalne predstave o trajnostnosti, krhkosti in tradiciji, zlasti če jih razumemo v kontekstu turizma, delujejo kot med seboj tesno povezani emski koncepti. Predstavljajo namreč orodje ali diskurzivno strategijo za različne akterje na Solčavskem, na podlagi katere se pozicionirajo v mnogoterih družbenih odnosih med nami in njimi, preteklostjo in prihodnostjo, naravo in kulturo, tradicijo in inovacijo, dobrim in slabim. Lokalna dojemanja trajnostnosti lahko torej razumemo tudi kot družbeno sprejemljiva orodja, s katerimi akterji svoje interese izražajo na način, ki jih kaže kot »objektivne«, »racionalne« ali »univerzalno veljavne« resnice.

INTRODUCTION

In a recent reflection on the sustainability of an anthropology of the Anthropocene, T. H. Eriksen briefly comments on the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a massive United Nations (UN) project that began in 2015. He notes that the word sustainability is "used extensively" in this project and that the broadness of this list poses a risk that sustainability will become "a vacuous placeholder" (Eriksen 2022: 4). Eriksen's critique of the term sustainability becoming overused and emptied of its content, thus sounding more like a buzzword (with ideological connotations) than a scientific term within the development strategies, is one of the underlying motivations for writing this article.

It has been widely pointed out in anthropology that the term is loaded with "contradictions, abuses and politically motivated uses" (Brightman and Lewis 2017: 1), and we have encountered similar contradictions in our research. Although there exists what T. H. Eriksen (2022: 1) refers to as "common consent" about what sustainability means,[1] we approach it as a broad, ever evolving framework that encompasses economic, environmental, cultural, and social dimensions. Our research prioritises the emic interpretations of sustainability, focusing specifically on how local tourism providers in the Logar Valley in the Slovenian Alps understand and use the term and how it affects their tourist practices. Therefore, our analysis does not take the concept "as is" or rethinks its theoretical implications, but rather explores the local dynamics and perceptions that gravitate around "sustainability". Other undoubtedly relevant viewpoints – namely the (re)framing of large- and small-scale sustainability or "organic" discourses within agriculture and especially high-mountain farming in Slovenia, as well as the relations between these discourses and more structural aspects, such as the (national and EU) policies with their numerous forms of financial supports and subsidies – will not be discussed in this article (see Bartulović and Kozorog 2014; Frelih Larsen 2009; Knežević Hočevar 2018; Slovenc and Erjavec 2021).

[1]

In Eriksen's view (2022:1) by common consent, sustainability "refers to quality enabling something to sustain itself, in other words, to be capable of reproducing itself without undermining the conditions of its own existence." By further noting the need to acknowledge the incorporation of changes in this definition, he proposes a "less rigid definition", which suggests, that "a sustainable system is one which is capable of reproducing itself for an extended period without undermining its own conditions, absorbing incremental changes without collapsing" (Eriksen 2022: 1).

Acknowledging the importance of local histories and contexts, we use the Logar Valley as a case study to explore how sustainability materialises in a specific place and time. Our research in the broader region of Solčavsko has been ongoing since 2020, when we, together with another colleague, Blaž Bajič, co-organised the first Ethnological Summer Camp, which now takes place annually. The camp consists of a week of field research for students, thematic lectures by mentors, and close collaboration with the local community in Solčavsko. The findings presented in this paper are therefore also based on the contributions of the students, Blaž Bajič, Sandi Abram, Jaka Repič, and other colleagues who participated in the ethnological camps or contributed to the published research volumes (Bajič, Svetel and Zavratnik 2021; Svetel, Zavratnik and Bajič 2022), as well as other research at least partially related to the aforementioned camp (Bajič 2023; 2024; Korbar 2024; Krašovic 2022; Svetel 2022; Vršnik 2022, 2024, etc.). In the period between 2020 and 2024, almost ninety interviews were conducted by students and researchers, with some people repeatedly. We have also organised round tables and presentations of student research, participated in community public events, and visited the region for tourism purposes. Since 2022, the research activities have intensified as part of the DigiFREN project, which addresses the digital aestheticization of fragile environments.

More detailed conversations focusing on the concept of sustainability in the Logar Valley were carried out in 2024, when we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five tourism service providers in the valley in which we addressed their perception of sustainability and the sustainable practices they conduct. However, since sustainability was introduced as the central topic of our discussions when we contacted our interlocutors, we acknowledge that this emphasis might have shaped our interlocutors' responses. Given the "symbolic resource" (Apostoli Capello 2023) attached to the term in public discourse in Solčavsko and beyond, using alternative terminology, such as tradition, ecology, local knowledge or care for the environment – or avoidance of using any of these often empty signifiers – could have brought different concerns to light.

THE SETTING

The Slovenian Tourist Board describes the Logar Valley as "one of the most beautiful Alpine glacier valleys in Europe. The harmonious coexistence between tradition, man and nature that you will find in this area of Solčavsko is exceptional and rarely experienced anywhere else" (Slovenian Tourist Board 2024). We will take a critical look at the notions of "harmonious coexistence" later to unravel its meanings and implications in this local context but let us first briefly introduce the location and its specificities.

Solčavsko can be considered a typical Alpine area, but at the same time, it is also a very specific environment. It is located in the north of Slovenia, on the Austrian border in the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, and with almost 550 people living on around 103 km², it is the most sparsely populated municipality in Slovenia (Občina Solčava 2024). It consists of three glacial valleys – the Logar Valley being one of them – that form four settlements (Logar-

ska dolina, Robanov kot, Matkov kot, Podolševa), and numerous farms that are dispersed throughout the glacial valleys. Today, Solčavsko and especially Logar Valley are increasingly popular tourist destinations, but until 1894, when the first road connected Solčavsko to other parts of the Upper Savinja Valley, the region was difficult to access and relatively isolated. Many farms in Solčavsko are located at high altitudes, well above 1000 metres above sea level. With an average size of 130 ha (Občina Solčava 2024), the farms of Solčavsko are, for socio-historical reasons, much larger than the average farm in Slovenia, which measures only 7.0 ha (SURS 2021).

Photo 1: Map of Solčavsko. The Centre Rinka website.

The area that is the focus of our research, the Logar Valley, is not only the most iconic part of the region (Klaus 2010), but is also registered as a landscape park. The first organised activities in nature conservation there date back to 1931, when there was a desire to protect its "natural beauty" as the number of visitors to the surrounding mountain tops increased. Efforts were made to establish the Logarska dolina-Okrešelj National Park, but due to the Second World War, this did not happen (Gerl 2004: 102–110; see also Poličnik 2008). It wasn't until 1987 that the Municipality of Mozirje declared the area a landscape park (Naravni parki Slovenije 2024). In 1992 the concession to manage the park was awarded to the company Logarska dolina d.o.o., which was run by members of the local community (Gerl 2004: 6; Lenar 2021: 135). As the locals say, this way of managing a protected area – namely,

that it was being managed by the locals themselves – was the first such case in Slovenia. In 2017, however, the concession to manage the park was transferred back to the municipality (now the Municipality of Solčava) (Logarska dolina 2024), which has also caused some disagreements between the local community and the municipality.

The Logar Valley Landscape Park comprises of 104 natural heritage units and 55 cultural heritage units, one of which is recognised as a cultural monument of national importance. However, the valley itself is also protected as a cultural landscape, and it then comes as no surprise that the Logar Valley is renowned both nationally and internationally for its "unspoiled" and fragile Alpine beauty, where a visitor seeking a calm getaway can find a picturesque retreat. The ways in which sustainability is understood in Solčavsko are thus strongly marked by the regimes and regulations of the Logar Valley Landscape Park and its popularity as a tourist destination.

As has been thoroughly described by Clarke (2007: 32–35), the main economic drivers in the region shifted from farming to forestry in the 1950s and later to tourism. Tourism became important in the beginning of the 20th century, and in 2007 reportedly already held a 35% share in the regional economy (Clarke 2007: 18). The economic role of tourism and hospitality in the Logar Valley is also historically attested; for example, Drago Meze writes of the "modest earnings" (1963: 225) farms in the Logar Valley made from tourism in the summer months. In recent years, Solčavsko has increasingly been presenting itself as a tourist destination in sustainable contexts that seemingly legitimise its tourism development. This resonates with the broader observations of Amanda Stronza, who emphasized that "[i]n the past decade or so, the tourism industry has taken major shifts toward goals of economic and ecological sustainability, local participation, and environmental education" (Stronza 2001: 263).

Slapnik and Bogataj (2016) noted that one of the first milestones of "sustainable development" was set with the establishment of the aforementioned landscape park in 1987, which preceded numerous certificates and awards. For example, the CIPRA International was awarded to the management of Nature Park Logarska dolina in 2005; the European Commission recognised Solčavsko as a European Destination of Excellence in 2009; Center Rinka (a multipurpose centre for sustainable development) was awarded the Golden Pencil in 2011, Plečnik's Medal in 2012 and the 3rd prize in the Constructive Alps competition in 2013; the Municipality of Solčavsko received the "Golden Stone" Award in 2012; the Logar Valley–Solčavsko destination was awarded the golden label Slovenia Green Destination 2020, and in 2019 and 2020, it was listed among the Top 100 sustainable destinations. The perception of the region as being particularly sustainable is highlighted by different actors, while the labels and awards are understood as external and official "proof" of their endeavours which, as we will show, interrelate with multiple temporalities, economic sectors and even with what Slapnik and Bogataj call "moral cores":

> The case of the Alpine region Solčavsko demonstrates how a commitment to nature and tradition as the moral core, and the alignment of the local population under common goals, released the sustainable development potential of an entire region. (Slapnik and Bogataj 2016: 89)

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Fragile Sustainability or Sustainable Fragility? Local Understanding of Global Terms in the Logar Valley

When we talked to different tourism providers in the Logar Valley, from the tourist farm and guest house to the mountain hut and medium-sized hotel, about how they see sustainability, the discussion soon shifted from abstract talk to more practical or seemingly mundane topics closely related to their everyday life and tasks they need to carry out within their sector. We grouped the various topics that predominated in all the conversations into four sets and consequently identified four thematic clusters, namely food practices, the temporalities of tourism, transportation, and general environmental concerns. They form the empirical core of this article. With the ethnographic examples from each of these clusters, we aim to show how this often abstract, trendy or seemingly global "sustainability rhetoric" (Knežević Hočevar 2018: 28) materialises and is translated in a local setting, and how they are understood as embedded in already existing social practices and cultural values.

It is not our intention to define what sustainability in the Logar Valley *is,* to discuss whether the practices and views of the tourism providers *are* sustainable, or to evaluate them in any (moral, academic, ecological or social) sense, but rather to examine *how* the main tourist actors in the valley talk about sustainability, which topics they perceive as falling into the category of sustainability, and which other concepts emerged in their narratives as connected to sustainability issues. Our entry point is therefore similar to Elena Apostoli Cappello's, who approached sustainability "as a relational category and a bargaining ground, the meaning of which changes depending on who is claiming it and why" and not as a "disembodied, ahistorical and apolitical condition" (Apostoli Cappello 2023: 4).

During the conversations, it quickly became evident that a more or less implicit sense of fragility underlies the interlocutors' perceptions of sustainability (see also Apostoli Cappello 2023: 6–8). What is more, the perceived fragility of both the environment and the community plays an important role in generating and maintaining the practices and values related to sustainability. In his analysis of the care for the landscape in the broader region of Solčavsko, Bajič argues that when we talk about fragility, "we are dealing with a specific relationship" (2023: 118). He shows that

> [i]n this relationship, the landscape is 'automatically' assumed to be fragile, i.e., dependent on the (appropriate) activity of the caretaker, who is also dependent on its vitality. Fragility, in other words, functions as an aesthetic category, i.e., a blend of specific perceptions and discourses. (Bajič 2023: 118)

In our case, this relationship predominantly involves the local actors, who more or less directly understand themselves to be the guardians, caretakers or upholders of the "natural" environment and landscape, the local practices and skills, the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the area (cf. Bajič and Zavratnik 2022), and as individuals who, in short, have the knowledge to maintain and balance the various, often multispecies relations. Even though the examples (or relationships) in the paragraphs below explicitly address sustainability, they often implicitly bring forth the idea (and the moral obligation) of fragility as

well. Furthermore, the terms of tradition, locality, and heritage were often conceptually or semiotically merged with sustainability, as will be explained with examples in subsequent sections, where we will present the four thematic clusters mentioned above. Before turning to these, the words of one interlocutor aptly summarise the importance of observing the talk of sustainability not as separated but as dynamically blended with the other terms:

> For me, sustainability in this house means first and foremost working together or relying on tradition, in the sense of both cultural and natural heritage. Everything we do is somehow connected to the intangible cultural heritage as well as tangible cultural heritage. And the natural heritage. First and foremost, this notion of sustainability embeds the concept of tradition. And what I find particularly important is that we value the work of the locals. The knowledge of the locals.

FOOD PRACTICES

All of the main tourism service providers in the Logar Valley offer at least some food on their premises, and most of them place great emphasis on it, highlighting their cuisine on their websites, social media and *in situ*. But the question of food is not only part of the classic repertoire of tourism – it serves as one of the key elements through which they think and portray their sustainable orientation. One of the first things all of them mentioned when we brought up the topic of sustainability was the local cuisine and the food they offer in their establishments. Even before we had explicitly asked about sustainability, one interlocutor, a young woman who with her partner runs a mountain hut that offers accommodation and food, pointed this out:

> When it comes to sustainability, our main focus is on food. We really cook local, and fresh and homemade food. Even if there's less [choice]. I mean, even if we don't have six pages of different choices.

The ingredients or the food products they serve in all their meals should come from local sources, ideally from the nearby farmers. The recipes and the preparation techniques should be local, often deriving from family traditions of how to make, for example, *štruklji*, *žlikrofi* or *savinjski želodec*, to name a few "famous" ones. When talking about food, our interlocutors framed their understanding of sustainability with concepts such as "local" and "traditional", which we can understand through the "practices of locality" (Grasseni 2009).

This corresponds with the way they present themselves on their official channels. On their website, the mountain hut Logarski kot states: "Our menus are based on traditional cuisine and locally produced ingredients" (Logarski kot 2024). Similarly, the website of the Ojstrica House reads:

> In a natural setting, Ojstrica House offers you a unique culinary experience, with a focus on traditional cuisine from the region and seasonal dishes, mostly made with locally produced ingredients. […] Our menu changes seasonally, as we feel it is important to be able to support local farmers and producers. (Hiša Ojstrica 2024)

Photo 2: A menu offering "typical" Slovenian food. Ana Svetel, Logar Valley, February 2024.

In the conversations, the terms "local" or "home-made" were often used synonymously with "sustainable", and had an undoubtedly positive connotation. Many interlocutors also showed us the menus to illustrate their claims.

The ideas that the tourism providers act as responsible and sustainable actors within the community are expressed through the claims that they buy products from farmers in the region (dairy products, jams, meat, etc.), and therefore support the local agriculture and contribute to the economic sustainability of the area. Additionally, by offering "traditional" dishes, they maintain the image of an Alpine destination with its own culinary specifics.

Through this prism we can better understand the view, which was explicitly expressed by one tourism provider, namely that once in the Logar Valley, "one cannot eat *Wiener schnitzel*". The idea that certain foods belong in the valley and others do not was present among all the interlocutors, even though the category of what food was "appropriate" differed slightly. The mountain huts and the farm stays that primarily target hikers and mountaineers emphasize simpler dishes such as stews, thick soups and strudels, while the more luxurious Hotel Plesnik offers "a superb four-course dinner" (Hotel Plesnik 2024). But this culinary experience is still described through the lens of locality: "The authenticity of the flavors and the connection to the local environment can be felt on every plate" (Hotel Plesnik 2024).

Regardless of the type and category of the tourism provider, the menus and the web descriptions thus often visually and textually reflect what we have termed *Alpine food domesticity*. This implicitly sustains the local farmers and their agricultural traditions, which in turn maintain the picturesque, tranquil scenery of the Logar Valley and the surrounding

areas, with the cattle grazing in the meadows around the farms or the mountain pastures during the summer months.

The questions about the products that are not local or home-made were answered with more reluctance. After some thought, the interlocutors mentioned mostly fruits and some vegetables that do not grow (or are not produced in large quantities) in the Solčavsko region. What we identified as a pattern was that the interlocutors tended to put the local culinary products they offer in the spotlight of their narrative, only mentioning the non-local ingredients or foods if directly asked about them – and even then, their explanations were rather vague or unclear. When we asked one interlocutor about her occasional shopping trips to the nearby Austrian town where she buys a significant proportion of foodstuffs for breakfasts, a habit we knew about from our previous fieldwork in the region, she visibly became reluctant to talk about it. The very same routine she had openly described to us on previous occasions, when our research topic was not sustainability, suddenly became a topic to avoid. This ethnographic dissonance shows that sustainability functions as a moral category, and its value-based imperatives necessarily influence ethnographic conversations. Long-term ethnography and understanding of the wider social circumstances are therefore necessary to contextualise the "sustainability talk" or spot any inconsistencies.

Many tourism providers pointed out that the food they offer is what the visitors expect. This kind of "locavore demand" (Apostoli Cappello 2023: 3) therefore presumes a relationship between the tourist, tourism service provider, and the environment, which seems greatly harmonious, since both the tourist and the provider value the same local culinary experience which presumably leads to the sustainability of the "natural" environment and the local economy. This kind of sustainability-induced supply and demand dynamic is evident in the words of one interlocutor:

> … and most visitors come because they're interested in the local cuisine. They immediately ask if it's homemade – from sour milk to *sirnek* [a local cheese speciality] and other specialities from Solčava, such as *savinjski želodec* [a local meat product]. Quite a few visitors come here especially for this reason. Of course, there is also the classic crowd of those who just want to eat schnitzel and fries, but most people who come with the purpose of exploring the valley are interested in these things. We, personally, also direct them to the farms. They want to know where the cheese comes from, because it's good. I give them a contact and send them to these farms. The Solčava panoramic road, the Klemenšek farm and so on. We're connected with the farmers and try to promote each other as much as possible, and in this way, the guests can get the most out of their experience. You offer them the best product you can, and why wouldn't you? This is especially true for foreign tourists. Foreign tourists mainly want local products. *Žlinkrofi* [dumplings], for example, are something that everyone wants to try. And then there are traditional mountain dishes like *jota* [a thick stew]. They really have a desire for local dishes. Hikers in particular know this, and it's part of their culture and their purpose in coming here, from *ričet* to jota, because these are dishes that we don't usually cook at home. Foreigners, yes, foreigners specifically ask, 'Is this local?' And I tell them, yes, the meat in the goulash comes from Robanov kot. They really appreciate it and think it's great that they can see where the cows graze. It's particularly interesting for foreigners that they can literally visit the farm if they want to. They find it really fascinating. If you come from a big city, it's quite a 'wow' moment when you realise that this is even possible.

However, the selection of dishes and food products offered at the tourist accommodations in the valley was not a "spontaneous" process or a "natural" fact, but a process of reinventing the local food (cf. Grasseni 2017). One interlocutor recalls the decisions that were made when she started to offer meals in the mountain wooden hut (which was previously a summer home for shepherds) in the beginning of the 1990s:

> When I started, I remember that Gusti Lenar was the director at the time. And when I started working, he said, 'Here, we'll have only local dishes: žganci, mushroom soup, and such.' But I said, 'Who's going to eat žganci? No one's going to eat that.' And he said, 'Yes, yes, these kinds of things belong here, and that's what we'll have.' It seemed really silly to me. I thought no one would eat it, because even at home we didn't eat that much of it. But then I saw that he was absolutely right. People really seek this out.

THE TEMPORALITIES OF TOURISM

The second thematic cluster we recognised as being framed through the lens of sustainability was related to the various rhythms of tourism. Our interlocutors, as well as municipal strategies and visions, emphasized that they want to avoid mass tourism and prefer to offer more boutique or tailored experiences, and therefore focus on niche programmes that stem from the "fragile" and "limited" but at the same time "precious" and "unique" environment of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps. Such examples are the anti-burnout and anti-stress packages, the Pure Power of Nature package or the detox programmes offered by Hotel Plesnik and Na razpotju. The underlying premise is that the Logar Valley can function as a location where time "slows down" or even "stops", and where visitors can take a break from their fast, stressful, and urban everyday lives. While many tourism providers implicitly present the location in this framework, some talk about this temporal aspect directly:

> This place has a certain peculiarity. On the one hand, it's great, and everyone who comes up here, the moment they step out, it feels like time stops. Have you felt that? It's amazing, you can't believe it.

The same interlocutor stresses that the valley is also a suitable location to "log-out" from everyday routines:

> Otherwise, what we've noticed is that very often people come here alone. Either a woman by herself or a man by himself. But basically, whoever you talk to, they all want to be alone because they just can't [cope] anymore. They can't stand their phone, their coworkers, their friends – they just want peace. When it all gets to be too much.

Similar temporal sentiments can also be found in hiking and mountaineering types of tourism, which had already started in Solčavsko in the 19th century – the Alps represented not only one of the main national symbols but also the romantic idea of refuge and almost mythical otherness (Mikša 2021; Peternel 2020; Šaver 2005).

But the temporalities of tourism are not related only to affective and symbolic orien-

tations towards "slower" or more "meaningful" time. The following words from a tourism service provider who offers wellness programmes as well as accommodation show that the temporalities they refer to also include more practical goals:

> When we renovated the wellness centre, we were looking for a programme that would fit in here so that guests would come regardless of whether it's raining, snowing or windy. And so they would stay for several days.

Photo 3: Promotion of anti-burnout and anti-stress packages. Hotel Plesnik Website. December 2024.

They are also closely connected to the endeavours to lower the numbers of daily visitors and prolong the average length of stay to at least a few days. One-day visitors are often perceived as a burden for the valley, sometimes referred to as "crowds" that flood the landscape park and throw it "out of balance". At the same time, in the eyes of the tourism providers, they are not the visitors that sustain the local economy since they tend not to purchase the local products or other tourist offerings. The "issue" with one-day visitors is strongly seasonally framed – they are perceived as a problem especially during the high season, which peaks on the weekends in July and August. In our previous ethnographic research in the valley, we have never spotted any negative comments about the daily visitors who come to the valley in the winter for cross-country skiing, let alone the visitors that arrive during the low seasons of late autumn or early spring.

Many interlocutors emphasized the seasonal imbalance of the numbers of visitors, with a relatively short high season from June to September, when, especially during the weekends and on 15 August, which is a national holiday in Slovenia, the valley becomes simply "too full" and therefore "out of balance", which leads to perceptions of unsustainability. This unsustainability usually materialises in problems related to infrastructure and

transportation, which we will address in the next section. The challenges the community and the environment face when dealing with sudden influxes of tourists are associated with increased traffic and overcrowding. Many interlocutors expressed their goal to extend the tourist season and to avoid growth in numbers during the peak season: "Our aim is not to have more tourists here. The aim is to prolong the season."

The temporal unsustainability as framed by the tourism service providers is closely connected to fragility. The sense of the valley's fragility was explicitly addressed when we talked about the peak tourist periods, especially the warm and sunny summer weekends, when the valley turns into a place with too many people and too many cars. They are said to strain the resources of the valley and to pose a threat to the fragile balance in both the "natural" and "social" sense. The level of fragility thus differs throughout the year. The valley was perceived as much more fragile during certain periods: during these "special" times, both the environment and the local community are seen as particularly fragile.

TRAVELLING TO/IN THE VALLEY

Closely related to the seasonal rhythms we addressed in the previous section is the issue of transport. Germ, Krampl and Krašovic argue that the locals "are trying to find ways to limit the crowds of cars, which are a daily burden to the environment, while at the same time wanting to keep the valley a popular tourist destination" (Germ, Krampl and Krašović 2022: 32).

It is precisely this balancing that seemed to be the main concern when the interlocutors brought up the (un)sustainable transport realities in the valley. Since 2020, when we began research in the area, the municipality officers, farmers, tourism providers and other actors have been mentioning different yet related options to us on how to address the issue of transport in the area. Some advocate for expanding the car park in front of the entrance to the valley and establishing various "green" and public transportation options at the entrance, such as bikes, e-bikes, and a bus that would drive into the valley; similar P&R regimes are found in Bohinj, another popular Alpine region in Slovenia (Bajuk Senčar 2017). Another idea is to limit the number of vehicles entering the valley per day, which would "relieve" the valley and prevent overcrowding. However, this would limit the profits of the tourism providers and potentially transfer the overcrowding to other popular locations in the municipality, such as Roban and Matk Cirque and the Solčava Panoramic Road.

One interlocutor that strongly supports the idea of encouraging visitors to park at the entrance of the valley pointed out that she would rather drive the visitors back to the car park if they get caught by bad weather or lose track of time:

> We're also like that personally — if someone is late and it's dark or if they get caught in a storm, we're prepared to drive them to the start of the valley so they don't have to walk. Just to reduce the number of cars so it doesn't get too crowded.

Another interlocutor sometimes drives her guests to the steepest part of the panoramic road and drops them off at a point from where they can make a round trip back to the

valley by bicycle. This practice enables the visitors that might not be able to ride their bikes for the whole road to still experience it on bicycles instead of driving their cars (and stopping at the scenic spots).

Even though the interlocutors embraced the increased cycling in the area, one of them was concerned with the problems the increasingly popular and promoted e-biking can bring:

> In the last few years, cycling has increased considerably, especially with electric bikes for riding in the mountains. But we don't have anywhere to set up a proper bike storage facility so it could be locked and guests could bring their own bikes. Because it is forbidden to build anything, we're not allowed to do anything.

After some minutes, the interlocutor returned to the issue again:

> This is now something everyone must have, a bicycle parking facility. And we have a real problem. Where should we put them? Because we're not allowed to have such facilities. They don't allow it. But people expect and demand them. Some bikes are worth, I don't know, ten, twenty thousand euros – you can't just leave them outside.

Since the valley is a landscape park and a protected area, it falls under the regulations of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (Slovene: ZVKDS, Zavod za varovanje kulturne dediščine). Tensions between the institute and the conservation policies on the one hand and the aspirations of some of the inhabitants in the area on the other have also been ethnographically recorded in non-tourism contexts (Hazler 2021; Hostnik and Klanšek 2021; Jerkič, Kristan and Mlinarič 2021).

The opinion that the issue of the increasing traffic cannot be addressed only within the landscape park or the municipality but needs to be addressed more broadly by strengthening public transportation in the country with regular bus lines between Solčavsko and Slovenian cities was also expressed. This idea was often underlined with a (nostalgic) reference to the bus line that connected Zagreb and the Logar Valley for some time in Yugoslavia. This reference functions as a (affective) reminder that "back then" public transportation services seemed to work more efficiently.

The perceived remoteness was also sensed among some of our interlocutors. Since the Logar Valley is located higher up in the Savinja valley than the village of Solčavsko, the (few) buses that connect the municipality with the capital or nearby towns (Celje, Velenje) only go to Solčava. The lack of public transportation in the valley is recognised as an issue that affects not only the visitors but also the local population and the workers, as expressed by one interlocutor:

> The buses come as far as Solčava, but no further. Our children are at a real disadvantage. They can't take part in activities because my husband and I can't always drive them, because no matter where you go, it takes at least an hour. And that's very unfair. It's a problem, a big problem. Public transport would be used by us, the residents, the tourists and the employees. But nobody can use it because it simply doesn't exist.

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However, all these various thoughts and opinions on how to manage the increasing traffic in the valley focus primarily on daily visitors. The car park at the end of the valley, near the Rinka waterfall, was presented to us as the most pressing and spatially unsustainable location, the number of vehicles entering the valley making it the epicentre of the problem. "Everybody's going crazy to get one photo on Instagram. Everybody wants to get to the Rinka waterfall with a car. And there should be a way to stop this," pleaded one interlocutor as we were sipping home-made tea in the lobby.

We can see that various modalities are intertwined in the transportation issue: problems with the number of cars and the absence of public transport in the valley are interconnected and the interlocutors see them as one of the key weak points of sustainability. The increasingly popular (electric) biking was presented as (one) part of the solution, but the storage of e-bikes is becoming, as shown above, a growing concern. Another pressing issue, related to the various modes of mobility in the valley, is related to one of the desired modes, namely walking. Considerable parts of the valley belong to one farm and are used as meadows; they are not intended for walking or trespassing. However, in their search for photogenic spots, secluded paths or simply a spot to sit in the grass, some visitors enter the meadows and occasionally get into arguments with the farmer. In many parts of the valley, information boards remind the visitors to stay on the designated paths. But one of the interlocutors nevertheless mentioned the "audacity of people to walk across the meadows."
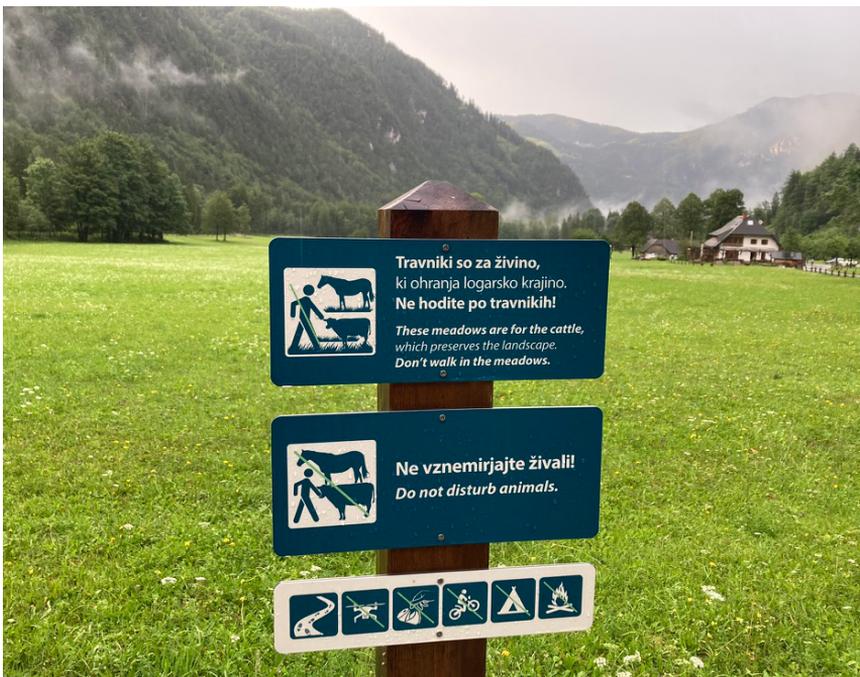
Photo 4: Signage at one of the meadows in Logar Valley. Ana Svetel, Logar Valley, July 2023.

In comparison to the first three, the fourth theme of this "materialisation" of sustainability was somehow more elusive. It was related to what we might imagine under the term "environmental sustainability", often framed within climate change discourse and translated into "care for the environment". Here, sustainability was perceived as a kind of moral obligation, oriented towards both the past and the future. Ancestors and their environmental practices were often referred to as a form of proto-sustainability, as a mode of sustainable human-environment relations before the word sustainability even existed or became trendy. Let's look at one example:

> The word sustainability, right, it wasn't worded like that. What I want to say [is] that this action, this mentality, this philosophy has always been performed in the Logar Valley. And lived. But it is a fact that in the last few decades this [word] has started to be used as a kind of niche market [...]. Sometimes people abuse this [word] for commercial purposes. [...] And I would say that this word sustainable development, sustainable progress, sustainable engagement, everything that has to do with sustainability, are just some phrases that are fashionable today. And not just fashionable. This word has simply been found now. Because in the past this wasn't named.

This idea is present not only among the local tourism service providers, but is also explicitly part of the municipal strategy for sustainable tourism, as is visible from the slogan tourism providers use: "Logar Valley - Solčavsko, a connected, resilient, and balanced mountain community; we proudly build upon the centuries-old tradition of sustainable practices of our ancestors." Meanwhile, we can read on The Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism website that in the Logar Valley, "sustainability is a centuries' old tradition" (Slovenia Green 2024).

In the Logar Valley, the sustainability of the present day can therefore be seen as a continuation, and obligation, to preserve and care for what past generations have "given" to the current ones. Farmers, including the ones involved in agrotourism, are perceived as guardians – both of the community and of the environment.[2] Of course, they, too, perceive themselves as guardians. In this sense, the valley and its people have, in a certain respect, an atemporal existence, a metaphysical dimension of social and environmental infinitude and changelessness (see also Bajič 2023).

Another side of this temporality of sustainability is oriented towards descendants. One interlocutor pointed out: "Sustainability is connected to the mindset that in every decision, you think of 2 or 3 generations ahead." Her words resonate with Anna Tsing, who evocatively described sustainability as "the dream of passing a livable earth to future generations, human and nonhuman" (Tsing 2017: 51).

However, the conversations also revealed a somehow paradoxical contrast between these perceptions of sustainability, rooted in, so to say, the eternal order of the generations who dwelled, dwell and will dwell in the valley on the one hand, and the pragmatic reality

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[2] For a similar insight regarding specific coastal agricultural regions in Northern Italy, see Apostoli Cappello (2023: 8).

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of sustainability labels and certificates on the other. In fact, many of the same tourism service providers who emphasized the almost "metaphysical" drive for sustainability were also very "concrete" and practical when it came to demonstrating their sustainability in a very institutionalised manner. After all, they can attract tourists, especially foreign ones, with visual proof of their sustainability, since the logos of these certificates and labels are usually proudly displayed on their doors, at the reception and on their websites, and might even have a particular aesthetic dimension.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we reframed the concept of sustainability beyond its universalistic and often abstract applications, highlighting the importance of local perceptions and contexts to understand how sustainability materialises in a particular place and time. Using the ethnographic approach, we have shown that the sustainability discourses in the Logar Valley are influenced as much by global or institutionalised development goals and trends as by local histories, cultural backgrounds, and collective representations. We explored sustainability through the practices of tourism providers, as "an idea" where "local originality, creativity, imagination and resourcefulness complement strategic planning" (Anko 2007: 96), not only at the individual but also at the community level. In this article, we explore four themes that make the vague concept more concrete and localised.

The most notable context in which sustainability is discussed, utilised and promoted is connected to food practices. In line with the general growing interest in local gastronomic delicacies or, as Apostoli Cappello puts it, a "locavore demand" (2023: 3), "traditional" and homemade local dishes made from locally sourced ingredients are the predominant materialisation of sustainability. To encompass the broad implications of this aspect, we have coined the term *Alpine food domesticity*, which refers to the most commonly offered (and sought-after) "home-made" local dishes, but also more broadly to the preservation of traditional forms of agriculture and land cultivation – cattle and sheep grazing in the meadows and mountain pastures. Alpine food domesticity implicitly supports local farmers and agricultural traditions, but also the picturesque scenery of the Logar Valley and the surrounding areas and therefore reinforces specific aesthetics and tastes.

The temporality of tourism is another important context in which sustainability is discussed, practised, and displayed. Here we can follow two main temporalities – a balanced and an unbalanced time, eurhythmic and arrhythmic (Lefebvre 2004: 67). Firstly, there is the rhythm of tourism, which refers to the ability of the Logar Valley itself to slow down or even stop time and offer tourists the chance to relax and disconnect from the worries and pace of everyday life. Secondly, at certain times the valley is, in contrast, perceived as being out of balance. This occurs when it is flooded with tourists and cars, and so loses its intrinsic quality of calmness and tranquillity.

Transportation to and within the valley is closely related to the notion of balanced and unbalanced times and to the perception of the valley in terms of remoteness. Different

local ideas, strategies and mechanisms are discussed in relation to the very practical issues locals experience. As in other spheres that were not explicitly discussed in this article (see Jerkič, Kristan and Mlinarič 2021), limitations stemming from cultural and natural heritage protection regimes came to the fore. Due to strict protection regimes that are in some cases perceived as limiting local (sustainable) development, tourism service providers deal with practical obstacles in fulfilling the expectations of modern sustainability-oriented tourists, for example, e-cyclers.

Finally, the local discourse on sustainability is connected to wider environmental aspects. Here, sustainability is often framed in terms of proto-sustainable practices that existed in the valley long before the term "officially" became popular and widespread. In this sense, sustainability is closely connected to concepts of tradition, heritage, local knowledge and family, and is understood as a kind of moral obligation not only to the past (and as respect for ancestral practices) but also to the future, in the sense that the landscape, heritage and way of life must be preserved for future generations, albeit in the environmental sense, the future might itself seem fragile. These views can be illustrated with the words of Marko Slapnik and Nevenka Bogataj (2016) that speak of the moral core of the region and frame it with the wording: "Nature and heritage are not here to be changed, but to change us!" However, despite this metaphysical dimension that the locals claim for themselves, care for the environment also materialises in much more pragmatic aspects such as certifications and quality labels, which also demonstrate the economic importance of sustainable approaches in tourism and can even have – displayed at doors, entrances or reception desks of tourist premises – a specific aesthetic dimension.

In conclusion, local perceptions of sustainability, fragility, and tradition, and especially when understood in the context of tourism, function as closely interlinked emic concepts. They function as a tool or discursive strategy that allows the various actors in Solčavsko to position themselves within the multiplicity of social relations between us and them, past and future, nature and culture, tradition and innovation, good and bad. Similar to Apostoli Cappello's insights on agricultural practices in Northern Italy, we can see how sustainability can and is also used in discursive contexts "as a resource for negotiating access to resources at the local level" and as a "source of political legitimization" (Apostoli Cappello 2023: 18). They can thus be understood as socially acceptable tools of expressing their interests in a way that makes these interests appear as "objective", "rational" or "universally valid" truths.

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POVZETEK

V prispevku se osredinjava na percepcije in materializacije trajnostnosti v Logarski dolini. Z obravnavo izbranih lokalnih turističnih ponudnikov pokaževa, kako se na prvi pogled abstraktna ideja trajnostnosti upomenja na štirih ključnih področjih: v kulinariki in prehranskih vidikih, časovnosti turizma, mobilnostnih praksah ter skrbi za okolje. Trajnostnosti ne razumeva kot analitični koncept, temveč kot emsko kategorijo, prepleteno z lokalnimi predstavami o krhkosti, tradiciji in identiteti. Pri tem pokaževa, da ideje o trajnostnosti lokalni turistični akterji uporabljajo tudi kot (diskurzivno) orodje za izražanje lastnih interesov, ki jih predstavljajo kot objektivne, splošno razširjene in moralno »pravilne« resnice. Etnografska raziskava osvetljuje, kako se globalni in ideološko konotirani koncept trajnostnosti percipira in materializira v družbeno in kulturno specifičnih okoliščinah izbrane alpske turistične destinacije.

Med štirimi ključnimi področji članek izpostavlja ideje o lokalni kulinariki in prehranskih tradicijah, ki jih turistični akterji tesno povezujejo s trajnostnostjo. Hrana, pripravljena iz lokalnih sestavin, naj bi odražala ohranjanje tradicije, podpirala lokalne kmetovalce in prispevala k trajnostnemu razvoju regije, hkrati pa naj bi ustrezala pričakovanjem gostov. Drugo področje, ki ga opredeliva kot časovne ritme turizma, v ospredje postavlja turistične reprezentacije Logarske doline kot kraja »zaustavitve časa«, vračanja k umirjenosti ter odklopa od hitrega (in digitalno nasičenega) ritma vsakdana, pri tem pa se, paradoksalno, dolina hkrati sooča z izzivi množičnega turizma in gneče v visoki sezoni, kar krni podobo umirjene ali kar »zunajčasovne« alpske idile. Na področju mobilnostnih praks upoštevava tako mobilnosti po dolini kot tiste med dolino in okoliškimi lokacijami ter tako javni kot zasebni prevoz, pri čemer turistični akterji mobilnostne prakse obiskovalcev pogosto prepoznavajo kot osrednji primer netrajnostnosti v dolini, saj naj bi množični obiski povečevali pritisk na infrastrukturo in okolje. V prispevku se dotakneva nekaterih morebitnih rešitev, o katerih razpravljajo sogovorniki, kot so uvedba »zelenih« možnosti prevoza in omejitev vstopa vozil v dolino, kar pa odpira vprašanja ekonomske vzdržnosti in dostopnosti. Skrb za okolje se v etnografskih gradivih kaže kot (včasih implicitna) moralna dolžnost, ki temelji na ideji spoštovanja in nadaljevanja okoljskih praks in znanj prednikov, ki naj bi bila trajnostna sama po sebi, ter vzdrževanju tega, s strani prednikov ohranjenega in sedanjim generacijam v skrbstvo zaupanega okolja za zanamce. Hkrati s temi »prototrajnostnimi« in čezgeneracijskimi idejami je trajnostnost povezana tudi s kulturno dediščino ter kulturno- in naravovarstvenimi vidiki Krajinskega parka Logarska dolina ter institucionalizirana s številnimi certifikati in nagradami, ki naj bi privabljale turiste in krepile podobo regije kot trajnostne destinacije.

Različna lokalna razumevanja pojmov trajnostnosti in krhkosti ter načini njihove (diskurzivne) uporabe pomagajo vzpostavljati dinamična razmerja med različnimi akterji in interesi na področju turizma v Logarski dolini. Percepcije trajnostnosti so torej neizogibno umeščene v kulturno in družbeno specifične okoliščine ter zato etnografsko relevantne.

The Long Journey to Senso-Digital Walking: Exploring Fragility and Care in an Alpine Valley

Dolga pot do čutno-digitalnih sprehodov:
raziskovanje krhkosti in skrbi v alpski dolini

Sandi Abram

ABSTRACT

This paper explores walking as a research tool and cultural practice, tracing the trajectories of its intellectual and methodological development in the social sciences and humanities. It examines early intersections between walking and aesthetic practices in the 20th century, highlighting key debates and advances. It then introduces senso-digital walks, an ethnographic method used in the Solčavsko region (Slovenia) to explore the understandings that emerge from a combination of sensory perceptions, environmental transformations, and digital technologies, while examining care, fragility, and localism.

KEYWORDS: walking ethnography, walking methodology, environmental fragility, Alps, senso-digital walks

IZVLEČEK

Prispevek obravnava sprehod kot raziskovalno orodje in kulturno prakso ter sledi njegovemu intelektualnemu in metodološkemu razvoju v družboslovju in humanistiki. Analizira zgodnja presečišča med sprehodom in estetskimi praksami dvajsetega stoletja, kjer so izpostavljene ključne polemike in premiki na tem področju. Nato so predstavljeni čutno-digitalni sprehodi, etnografska metoda, ki je bila na Solčavskem (v Sloveniji) uporabljena za raziskovanje razumevanj, ki izhajajo iz čutnih zaznav, preobrazbe okolja in digitalnih tehnologij, pri tem pa preučuje skrb, krhkost in lokalnost.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: sprehajalna etnografija, sprehajalna metodologija, okoljska krhkost, Alpe, čutno-digitalni sprehodi

Walking has long been recognised as more than a simple means of locomotion, or a mere activity of a body-in-motion; it is a human practice imbued with social, cultural, sensory, and affective significance (Ingold 2011; Ingold and Lee Vergunst 2008a). Although the body has been widely recognised as a research tool (Low 2015), walking as a research method, in particular, has surfaced over the past two decades across various paradigms in the social sciences and humanities (Bajič and Abram 2019; Bajič, Abram and Muršič 2022). Walking as an ethnographic method, along with the notion of the "ethnographer-as-walker" (Williamson 2016: 27), has become not only a commonplace but at times also a privileged practice in anthropological fieldwork. Central to walking methodologies and to the methodological turn is their ability to embed "ideas of the social and the symbolic within the immediate day-to-day activities that bind practice and representation, doing, thinking and talking, and to show that everything takes place, in one way or the other, on the move" (Ingold and Lee Vergunst 2008a: 3).

This article provides a brief overview and critical reflection on walking as a research methodology, and then, by introducing the method of senso-digital walking, seeks to enhance and contribute to the evolving discussion on walking as a research methodology. By engaging with some of the intellectual trajectories that have shaped the scholarship on walking practices, the paper shows how walking, once a rather sidelined practice, has turned into one of the central themes of anthropological inquiry, especially in contexts that are concerned with the understanding of sensory, affective, and material engagements with place.

I begin the discussion by highlighting the contributions of those who have used walking as a means of exploring (urban) space, and conclude with an overview of contemporary research conducted on foot, especially when it situates walking within the realm of sensory ethnography. Along the way, the literature review provides not only a comparative basis but also the entry point to present the development of senso-digital walking as a response to those critiques of walk-based research that have articulated its shortcomings in addressing sensory experience, digital mediation, and environmental transformation, among others.

The method of senso-digital walking, as applied during my fieldwork in the Solčavsko region (Slovenia) between 2022 and 2024, aimed to unpack the ways in which fragile environments are digitally aestheticized and how they are perceived. Thus, a series of ethnographic vignettes from Solčavsko, in which walking with a key participant is delineated, offers glimpses – and by no means an exhaustive account – of how (senso-digital) walking, alongside other, more "classical" methods, can illuminate complex issues, such as environmental change, fragility, care and localism in the Alpine context of Slovenia. In a way, the interplay, as well as the disengagement, between the sensory and the digital, allows for the final discussion on the entanglements between the human and non-human worlds. By providing these ethnographic snapshots, however, my aim is to illustrate a possible use and usefulness of senso-digital walking in research on environmental change.

Before moving in this more empirically grounded direction, I will trace some possible intellectual trajectories that have shaped the scholarship on walking practices and have, in one way or another, inspired the design of senso-digital walks.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF WALKING AS AN AESTHETIC
PRACTICE AND RESEARCH TOOL

A review of intellectual production in the social sciences and humanities over the last two decades reveals that walking studies have gained significant attention. The history of walking has been thoroughly examined (Amato 2004; Andrews 2020; Nicholson 2008; Solnit 2000; Wallace 1993); meanwhile, one of the most insightful discussions on how walking and research have intersected and diverged is found in the work of Bates and Rhys-Taylor (2017), who propose grouping walking practices into two main strands.

In the first strand, walking is seen as central to the production of philosophical and theological knowledge, functioning as a meditative practice through which one can arrive at rational and meaningful thought. The second strand, which traces the everyday pedestrianism of others, is of more recent origin (cf. Büscher and Urry 2009). This socio-anthropological and historical approach focuses on the everyday walking practices of others. Scholars in this stream examine power dynamics and resistance or the inherently social nature of walking within the modern city (Bates and Rhys-Taylor 2017: 1, cf. Solnit 2000). This strand, charting the genealogy of walking (Bates and Rhys-Taylor 2017), dates back to Romanticism, where walking in the countryside was understood as a way to (re)discover aesthetic and moral values that had been eroded by industrialisation and urbanisation. For the individual walker, this practice offered a person a way to reflect on the self and *his* role in the world (Andrews 2020; see Bajič and Abram 2019; Benjamin 1998, Coverley 2006).

I also follow in the footsteps of Marcel Mauss, who considered walking a valid ethnological research topic. In *Techniques of the Body* 1973 [1936], Mauss discusses walking within the broader context of the body as the essential instrument of human beings. In his conception, the body is both a technical object and a means of action, leading to the idea that the body can be shaped and manipulated through training. His argument culminates in the concept of techniques of the body: practices that "can be classified according to their efficiency, i.e., according to the results of training" (Mauss 1973 [1936]: 77). These techniques, including marching and gait, are passed down through training, or what Mauss refers to as dressage (see Fehringer 2020: 190–191, cf. Lefebvre 2004: 38–45).

However, from the 1960s onward, a new strand of walking research began to emerge. It combined epistemological and methodological elements from both of the above-mentioned traditions. What differentiates this development is that it embraced aesthetic, artistic, and artivistic practices, is grounded in experimentation and experience, and has since developed into a multidisciplinary understanding and application of research walking within academic contexts. Before delving further, it is essential to briefly outline and reconsider what has come to be known as the walking turn.

Hayden Lorimer situates the recent re-emergence of walking within the framework of new walking studies, which advance this interdisciplinary field by "uniting social and geographical research and critical arts practice" (Lorimer 2011: 30). Lorimer clusters walking into four thematic headings. The first is that of *walking as a product of place* (e.g. mountaineering, pilgrimage). The second theme is *everyday walkscapes,* referring to the practices of daily life. The third theme, *self-reflective walking practices,* encompasses those who perceive solitary walking as a "spiritual plane, rather than a practical-referential one" (Lorimer 2011: 23). Finally, the fourth theme is *political and creative walking,* where walking becomes "the expression of artistic invention or political intent" (Lorimer 2011: 24).

The realm of walking infused with art, activism, and artivism, intertwining research approaches with critical arts practices, has long been present in the history of artistic wanderings. Francesco Careri identifies three movements that influenced the artistic adoption of walking in the 20th century, namely the Dadaists and Surrealists, the Letterist International and, finally, the Situationist International (Careri 2018: 20–22, cf. Debord 2006 [1955]). In the second half of the 20th century, however, walking again played a central role in artistic practices concerned with the environment and ecology, including Minimal Art and Land Art (Careri 2018). From the 1970s onwards, movements such as New Media Art, Electronic Art, and others incorporated walking into the thematisation of developing technologies and media, linking it to various social, environmental, and political contexts (see Bajič and Abram 2019).

I conclude this periodization of walking by adding another significant moment in which artistic practices and environmental research intersected at a productive crossroads. In line with the previous categorisations, this fifth heading can be termed *research walking.* Within the history of walking as an aesthetic practice, research walking emerged in the late 1960s as a distinct method of investigating urban space, "as a cognitive tool, a consciously used technique, and a method/methodology of research" (Rogelja Caf and Ledinek Lozej 2023: 23). Besides early figures who used walking as a means of making sense of the changing urban fabric, research walking can be traced back to Michael Frank Southworth (1967), who pioneered the concept of soundscapes and experimented with mobile methods to explore urban soundscapes. Southworth's ideas were later popularised by acoustic ecologists R. Murray Schafer and Hildegard Westerkamp, who introduced the soundwalk method in 1974, describing it as "any excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment" by "exposing our ears to every sound around us no matter where we are" (Westerkamp 2001). By focusing on the "varying subjective experiences of places" and "moving narratives" (Westerkamp 2006), soundwalking offered a medium for analysing complex soundscapes from an embedded, experiential position. In other words, sounds recordings, previously considered primarily as artistic materials, became a rich source of sensory information that could be recomposed, analysed, and archived. These sounds represented valuable material for analytical insights into the specific dimensions of a certain environment – from urban soundscapes (Westerkamp 1994) to the acoustic landscapes of indigenous communities (e.g. Feld 2012).

It was not until the new millennium that walking as an ethnographic method was consolidated by Margarethe Kusenbach, who introduced the go-along method in 2003, with far-reaching variations (see Spinney 2015, Abram 2021: 26–27). The go-along method "brings to the foreground some of the transcendent reflexive aspects of lived experience as grounded in place" (Kusenbach 2003: 456). By the early 2000s, locomotion and footwork had become fresh points of departure for the study of perceptual activity (Ingold 2011: 46). Walking methodologies in anthropology reached a new milestone with the publication of the volume edited by Ingold and Lee Vergunst (2008b), and called for novel mobile methodologies in ethnographic research to capture elusive sensory experiences (Degen and Rose 2012; see Lee and Ingold 2006) by immersing the researcher's body in the "fleeting, multi-sensory, distributed, mobile, and multiple, yet local, practical and ordered making of social and material realities" (Büscher and Urry 2009: 103).

In sum, before the late 20th century, walking was rarely discussed as a research method in its own right in ethnographic fieldwork. It was not until the early 2000s that comprehensive discussions about walking as a specialised research method emerged, particularly in two areas: one concerned with the study of the body, embodiment, and sensory experience, and the other focused on landscape, place, and mobility (Rogelja Caf and Ledinek Lozej 2023: 25). The methodological openness to walking in ethnographic research coincided with several intellectual turns in anthropology, including the sensory, affective, and material turns, among others (Bajič, Abram and Muršič 2022: 15). Although Southworth (1967) experimented with soundscape research by blindfolding his participants and moving them around Boston in a wheelchair, such "walking" methods did not gain widespread attention until decades later. Epistemological and methodological debates expanded walking methods centred on one sense and performed with one individual at a time, into multisensory, collective explorations of urban spaces and beyond.

An illustrative example of this evolution is the emergence of transgenerational senso-biographic walking, which provided a framework for exploring the embodied and site-specific emergence of sensory remembering and experiences (Järviluoma 2022: 86). Initially designed to study the soundscapes of small towns by conducting walking interviews with individuals, this method has developed into transgenerational, multisensory walking practices involving two or more participants.[1] The intellectual legacy of this method has since inspired the development of senso-digital walks in non-urban areas of Slovenia.

In the following section, I will first introduce the Alpine valleys of Slovenia, where ethnographic research eventually turned into a specific walking method that used research on foot to explore the digital aestheticization of this environment (see also Bajič 2024). I will then situate the empirical material collected through senso-digital walks within the framework of care and fragility.

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[1] Between 2017 and 2021, researchers in Finland, the UK and Slovenia, including myself, Blaž Bajič and Rajko Muršič, employed sensobiographic walking in three mid-sized cities, including Ljubljana.

SENSING FRAGILITY AND CARE THROUGH
SENSO-DIGITAL WALKING IN THE SOLČAVSKO REGION

Solčavsko is an Alpine region in northern Slovenia, located in the Upper Savinja Valley, and bordering Austria to the north. Surrounded by the massifs of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, the region features several distinct glacial valleys, including the Logar Valley, Roban Cirque, and Matk Cirque. The Solčava Municipality covers an area of approximately 103 km², where four small settlements and surrounding farms have just over 500 inhabitants, making it the most sparsely populated administrative unit in Slovenia. Known for its biodiversity, approximately eighty percent of the region is under the ecological protection of the Natura 2000 network. The area includes two landscape parks: Roban Cirque and Logar Valley. The region is also known for its Alpine farming, with five homesteads located above 1,200 metres (Meze 1979: 33), and for its landowning families.[2] The local economy consists of three main sectors, namely (mountain) farming, forestry, and tourism (Svetel 2022: 76).

I began conducting fieldwork in Solčava in 2022, building on the prior experiences, contacts, and ethnographic insights of three colleagues who had worked in the region during previous years (see Bajič, Svetel and Zavratnik 2021; Svetel, Zavratnik and Bajič 2022). These three colleagues have been organising an annual student summer school in Solčava since 2020, which – with the assistance of students – has expanded the existing, though still largely incomplete, body of ethnological knowledge about Solčavsko. The week-long event blends lectures with thematically focused ethnographic research, which is carried out both in groups (of usually up to 5 people) and individually. Evening sessions provide space for moderated discussions and reflections between students and mentors, with the occasional participation of local residents (Bajič 2023: 112–114; Svetel 2022: 75). This framework has engendered a specific approach to data collection, which is best understood as a combination of multi-sited (Marcus 1995), collaborative (Elliott and Culhane 2017), and participatory ethnographic fieldwork (Bajič 2023; Svetel 2022).

Although ethnographic research in this Alpine environment had regularly been conducted on foot as part of the summer schools since 2020 (Bajič, Svetel and Zavratnik 2021; Svetel, Zavratnik and Bajič 2022), it was not until 2022 that walking was intentionally employed as a research method through the use of senso-digital walks. Over the course of two years (2022–2024), we conducted senso-digital explorations in Solčavsko with five key participants. Their ethnographic narratives on various topics were complemented by semi-structured interviews with fourteen local residents and visitors involved in various roles in Solčavsko, such as tourism service providers, municipal personnel, social media influencers, and local hunters. Additional methods included participant observation,

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Before the agrarian reform in Yugoslavia, five farmers in Solčavsko together owned more than 2,200 hectares of land (Meze 1963: 229), which is more than 20% of the present territory of the region. In 1945, over 80% of the land was concentrated in the hands of 22 farmers, with the Matk farming family, located in Matk Cirque, being the largest farmer in all of Yugoslavia at the time (Meze 1963: 228, 258).

informal conversations, engaging with locals in their everyday activities, including, among other, participating in Alpine transhumance, attending arts and crafts events, celebrating municipal holidays, joining a gathering of regional cheesemakers, and attending events showcasing the local dialect.

A key focus of the senso-digital walks in the Solčavsko region is how walking acknowledges the co-creation of ethnographic knowledge, where participants engage with researchers en route through conversations, interventions, and shared experiences. Moreover, it resonates with some of the premises put forward by Springgay and Truman (2018) in their notion of "walking-with place" as a critical and relational engagement with place, emphasizing the co-production and entanglement of human and more-than-human worlds. As Springgay and Truman explain, walking-with engages, among others, with local epistemologies, ontologies, and methodologies, and foregrounds the "more-than-human ethics and politics of the material intra-actions of walking research" in the presence of others (Springgay and Truman 2018: 11, 15).

This post-humanist focus is relevant in the context of fieldwork in the Solčavsko region, as it addresses another criticism of contemporary walking studies – namely, that these methods have not adequately captured the intersection of sensory perceptions and the "post-digital world" (Berry 2014) in environmental research. For instance, consider how digital technologies simultaneously enhance our sensory experiences, following McLuhan's classical argument, while also displacing and dispersing our senses through sensors in drones, data trackers, smartphones, various AR and VR devices, as well as other digital media and technologies (Bajič 2024: 51). The senso-digital walks were specifically designed to explore these interfaces, particularly the dynamic relationship between "the sensory" and "the digital". In doing so, they facilitated what Przybylski (2020) calls hybrid ethnography: a "temporally and spatially focused ethnographic study of the interrelatedness and in-betweenness of digital and non-digital, online and offline engagements" (Bajič 2022: 8).

To ethnographically research digital-environmental relationships in the Alpine region, it was important to think from, through, and with walking. The goal was to turn walkers in Solčavsko into critical storytellers and agents-interpreters, reflecting on the use of digital media and (digital) technologies in their surroundings as these environments unfolded beneath our feet. While we occasionally allowed for autoethnographic explorations and experimentation, the primary focus remained on collective data gathering. Before each walk, participants, if they agreed, were equipped with filming devices, such as body cameras. During the senso-digital walks, they were encouraged to engage with their experiences through the use of digital media and technologies and to narrate any past, present, or any other correspondences with the surrounding environment. The senso-digital walkers were free to choose both the route and the duration of their journey. Sometimes we strolled along flat, well-worn paths for only a few minutes, while at other times, we clambered up remote, challenging terrains that tested our endurance. Although we meticulously prepared for walks, we were often unable to carry them out due to various circumstances, ranging from adverse weather conditions, the seasonally timed obligations of potential participants

(such as work in the forests or tourism-related duties) to personal factors like illness, reservations about being filmed, unexpected emergencies, etc.

DIGITALLY SENSING FRAGILITY IN AN ALPINE VALLEY

Alongside conventional ethnographic methods, we thus engaged in senso-digital walking in the Solčavsko region with both visitors and locals to explore how "the sensory" and "the digital" possibly intertwine, and to identify the discrepancies between the two as observed through walking in this Alpine environment.

In July 2023, during a period of week-long fieldwork, we we conducted a second senso-digital walk with a key interlocutor. On this occasion, the research participant again chose to lead us along the right side of the valley, an area we later identified as having significant symbolic and material significance for the local population (see Bajič 2023; Korbar, Krašovic and Troha 2021). Alenka[3] began by telling us about a secluded spot rich in Alpine flowers on a scree slope, accessible only by an unmarked path. She also recalled a visit to a forest glade at high altitude to pick partridge berries and cranberries for jam. When asked what she says to day-trippers and tourists if they inquire about where to pick mushrooms, wild garlic or blueberries, she replied that she refers them to a "neutral" location, far from the right side of the Logar Valley: *"I usually send them to the [Solčava] Panoramic Road. [...] It's also nice to ask the local farmer [for permission]"* (Fieldnotes, 22 July 2023). We learned the exact sites of these microlocations in the Logar Valley as Alenka pointed them out while we walked. Another topic that emerged during the senso-digital walk was the issue of rock and boulder slides, which, according to her, have become increasingly common on the steep precipices of the Alps' northern faces in recent years. For Alenka, these slides are easily identifiable from a distance due to their distinctive brown-orange color, visible even to the naked eye from afar. As we gazed at the surrounding mountain massifs, Alenka explained that she perceived the forest and mountains as *"unstable"* (Fieldnotes 2023; see also Bajič 2023: 116 n. 10).

A similar point to Alenka's also came up in a conversation with an alpinist. He regularly climbs these parts of the Alps and posts about his breakneck, mostly winter ascents on his YouTube channel. According to his observations, the extremes in temperature – whether extreme cold or intense heat – affect the solidity of mountain rocks. As he explained, when *"extreme [weather] hits, it really doesn't help the compactness of our limestone."* In his opinion, the current *"crumbliness of certain [climbing] routes"* keeps increasing.

> I'm almost certain that when these people, these first climbers, were climbing, it [the rock of the climbing route] wasn't so crumbly. Sometimes I wonder: "How did you even climb this?" Sure, they were aces [in climbing]... but now it's so crumbly. For example, on Debelak's route on Velika Mojstrovka [mountain], there's a section graded IV+. That is tough. Everyone I've asked was like: "No way, that's not a IV+." Even if we assume it's an exaggerated rating, it's not a IV+. And I'm

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All verbatim quotations in italics were transcribed from walks and interviews, pseudo-anonymised and grammatically corrected for readability. The participants were assigned altered names corresponding to their age group.

almost sure that in the past, there was some kind of jug [a large, secure handhold that is easy to grip] or an extra piece of rock to hold onto, and that isn't there anymore. (Marko, September 2024)

Similarly, Alenka not only viewed the mountains as increasingly unstable but also considered them more dangerous for anyone venturing uphill, including mountaineers and visitors, due to unpredictable weather conditions.

I try to warn them about the weather conditions. If I think they might not be familiar with the conditions in the Alps, I try to scare them a bit. I explain for their own good that a storm could come, with loud thunder, that there could be lightning around them, and strong winds. (Alenka, July 2023)

In that same week in July, we experienced a powerful thunderstorm ourselves, driven across the valley by intense winds. Just moments before we were engulfed by gusts of wind and rain, a series of cracking sounds echoed in the distance. We realised only later that this was the sound of trees being felled by the wind. Alenka described these weather conditions as strange and quite unusual. While she was used to mild winds blowing from the southwest, she noted that in the past decade or so, intense gusts and storms from the north had begun to devastate the valley: *"In 2017, there were not only heavy wind gusts reaching 170 km/h, but also whirlwinds. My father's hat was swept away by one of them"* (Alenka, July 2023). Her father, joining our conversation, reflected on the recent storm: *"I've never seen anything like it before... for it to rain that way. Our horse was right there [in the meadow in front of the house], but I couldn't see it because the rain was falling so heavily"* (July 2023).
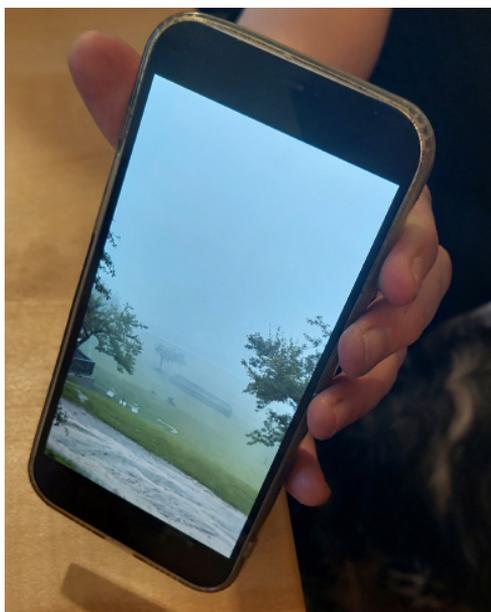
Photo 1: Alenka's photo of her encounter with a thunderstorm in the summer (Author: Sandi Abram, 19 July 2023).

Unsurprisingly, in the days that followed, our discussions and observations on her porch often turned to reflections on the changing weather patterns, severe weather events, shifts in seasons and temperatures, as well as environmental change in general. Past weather disasters, particularly those involving windthrows and windsnaps, and the uncanny feelings they provoked, remained a central theme during the conversations with Alenka. She sometimes decided to support these claims by showing us a collection of photos and videos saved on her smartphone. These sensory encounters with crumbling solidity and the "aesthetics of fragility" (Bajič 2023) are evidenced in her digital archive of more than 4,000 various photos, along a collection of hundreds of old postcards and photos of Solčavsko (see Photo 1).

As a local tourism service and accommodation provider, Alenka cares for this fragile environment in specific ways (see Bajič 2023: 125–126). She reserves the aforementioned places for herself and her friends, while at the same time warning tourists staying in her guesthouse about the increased risks of rock falls and unstable weather conditions in the higher areas of this glaciated valley. By selectively filtering what visual and verbal information reaches the outside world and demarcating safe and unsafe areas or conditions, these local aesthetic and care practices aim to micro-manage the movement of bodies in Solčavsko (see Korbar, Krašovic and Troha 2021). Having in mind the ethnographic vignette above, one could argue that the fragile environment in Solčavsko is produced, sustained, and maintained through the care and control exercised over the environment – land that is "inherited" by the local population – and that care and control over the landscape and the community encompass material, symbolic, and aesthetic dimensions. In the most elemental way, from the perspective of local people, it structures what they consider to be acceptable, accessible, and available. (Bajič 2023)

An example can help illustrate this argument. On 17 September 2022, we accompanied some students who were participating in a livestock drive in a part of Solčavsko. This involved walking as a group with local farmers to a mountain ridge where a flock of sheep had been grazing on a mountain pasture throughout the summer months. On that day, the forecast predicted snow, so the livestock needed to be herded down to the mountain farm in Robanov Cirque. After successfully gathering all the sheep, my colleague and I turned our attention to the forest floor during the descent to search for porcini mushrooms. When we returned to the mountain farmstead owned by one of the landowning families, with far more mushrooms than we could ever have expected to find (or manage to hold), we casually asked the surprised farmer if she wanted some. *"Half of what you've got,"* she replied without hesitation. It was only then that I realised this was *her family's* forest, and that my colleague and I had been gathering mushrooms on *their land* without asking permission (Fieldnotes 2022).

Care and control over the environment and the community can determine which paths, narratives, conversations, materialities, and aesthetics are permissible, affordable, and attainable – and which are not. As an ethnographic method, the walking method can facilitate a grounded understanding of these elements as they unfold in a specific place, but should also seek the ethnographic knowledge gained from other research approaches due to some of the limits outlined. Senso-digital walking, with its temporally limited "multisensory

ethnographic immersion" (Rhys-Taylor 2018: 140) thus seems to fall under the umbrella of the broader criticisms directed at walking methods, particularly that they are "often too methodical, systematic, and pre-determined by a priori research agendas" (Vannini and Vannini 2017: 179).

CONCLUSION: WALKING, FRAGILITY, AND ALPINE VALLEYS

Focusing on regions in Italy and Austria, Corrado describes the fragile areas in/of the Alps as mountain communities facing depopulation, negative demographic trends, infrastructural shortcomings, low levels of industrialisation, limited employment opportunities, a shortage of services, predominantly elderly populations, and limited tourism exposure, with fewer than 300 inhabitants and a high percentage of outbound commuters (Corrado 2010: 2). In contrast to such a socio-economic definition of fragility, the anthropological focus on Solčavsko, though presented here only through select frames, fragments and glimpses obtained through senso-digital walking and with other methods, points to the complexity of constructing the local's understanding of fragility. The notion of fragility in Solčavsko, as perceived by locals in their everyday life, seems interlinked in a multilayered flow of environmental and atmospheric changes, care and morality, mass tourism, localism, and autonomy, among others. In the discourse of locals, fragility becomes accentuated and tangible *inter alia* through the recent shifts from previously familiar experiences of climate patterns to unfamiliar atmospheric phenomena and environmental transformations. Take, for example, how Alenka expressed her concerns after the floods affected Solčavsko. Referring to the new weather patterns, she claimed: *"We need to accept this situation without being frightened by it"* (Fieldnotes 2024). The manifestations of these occurrences and disturbances, sometimes sources of uncanniness and unsettling affects, especially when they occur one after the other, tend to be documented by locals using digital devices and commonly also shared in person or online.

Over the past two years of conducting fieldwork in Solčavsko, it seemed that weather was no longer perceived, verbalised, and represented as simply "innocent" and "given",[4] but as "haunted by the specter of anthropogenic climate change" (Bubandt 2018: 4). Flood debris, cracked roads, gaps in the forest canopy, rock and boulder slides represented visual, material testimonies, often captured digitally, on the basis of which locals reflected on the social, cultural, and economic implications of climate change during our serendipitous encounters, informal discussions, and senso-digital walks.

The senso-digital walks, designed to explore the "messy" (Tsing 2004) field between sensory perceptions, sensor-driven digital technologies, and environmental transformations

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[4] In the memory of the locals in the Solčavsko region, past weather-related disasters were vividly remembered and referenced in conversation, including, for instance, a high-mountain fire at Rjavčki Peak (in 2021) and other fires caused by lightning strikes, windthrow events and the subsequent outbreak of bark beetles (in 2017), as well as landslides (in 2009), heavy snowfall (in 2020), and, more recently, floods (in 2023) (Interviews A1–A5).

thus represented neither the beginning nor the conclusion of the research path in Solčavsko. As I attempted to show, what one gathers through senso-digital walks needs to be put into active conversation with other "well-trodden" ethnographic methods. Even when we had not planned to walk with a specific person, and were therefore without the proper technical equipment, fieldwork serendipity often led to situations where interlocutors showed us places that were significant for their arguments, from forests, cultural heritage sites, tourism spots, and other areas. Using an anachronistic metaphor, Stoller (2017), trained in what he calls a culture of speed, reminds us that learning the culture of others requires a glacial pace, as social relations are built over long periods of time. His central call is to practice slow(er) anthropology, "in which scholars take the time to savor the sensorial dimensions of social life" (Stoller in Järviluoma et al. 2020), especially in a contemporary, fast-paced, digitalised world that has transformed the landscape of anthropological expression and inquiry.

In light of the criticisms directed at walking methods, senso-digital walks and similar "new" walking methods should neither turn into another form of academic branding (Bajič and Abram 2019: 32), and fall into the trap of capitalist commodification as the Situationists warned, nor serve as some sort of fast-paced shortcut to ethnographic accounts. Rather, they should be taken as opportunities that allow us to capture "a bit better" the verbalisations of how environments are experienced as they unfold beneath our feet during fieldwork.

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POVZETEK

Članek podaja pregled in refleksijo sprehajanja kot raziskovalne metodologije ter kulturne prakse. Sledi intelektualnemu in metodološkemu razvoju sprehajanja v humanistiki in družboslovju. Njegov namen je s predstavitvijo čutno-digitalnega sprehajanja, metode, ustvarjene za proučevanje čutnih percepcij in digitalnih tehnologij, spodbuditi razpravo o sprehajanju kot raziskovalni metodologiji. Prispevek predstavlja uporabo te metode v kontekstu Solčavskega, slovenske alpske krajine, za raziskovanje tem okoljske krhkosti, skrbi in lokalizma. Po obravnavi intelektualnih usmeritev, ki so oblikovale zgodovinsko in sodobno védenje o sprehajalnih praksah, bo umestil metodologije sprehajanja v domeno antropološkega raziskovanja, natančneje v kontekste in intelektualne tokove, ki jih zanima razumevanje čutnega, afektnega in materialnega doživljanja prostora. Na koncu razpravlja o vplivu raznih obratov na širitev metodološkega dosega raziskav, utemeljenih na sprehajanju.

Članek na podlagi čutno-digitalnih sprehajalnih intervjujev, opravljenih na Solčavskem med letoma 2022 in 2024, predstavlja sovpliv čutnega in digitalnega pri doživljanju prostora. Niz etnografskih vinjet prikazuje glavno udeleženko raziskave in načine, kako je uporabljala digitalne naprave, da je dokumentirala svoje izkušnje okoljskih sprememb, kot so spreminjajoči se vremenski vzorci, kamniti plazovi ter krhkost nasploh. Take pojave je udeleženka interpretirala ne le kot dane okoljske razmere, temveč tudi kot doživete izkušnje in dokaze podnebnih sprememb. Članek v sklepnem delu trdi, da lahko čutno-digitalno sprehajanje okrepi stare antropološke metode z zagotavljanjem potencialnih novih poti do uvidov v preplet čutne percepcije, digitalnega posredovanja in preobrazb okolja, obenem pa poudarja potrebo po dolgotrajnem, poglobljenem terenskem delu, ki je nujno za razumevanje kompleksnih odnosov med človekom in naravo v kontekstu krhkih okolij.

Perspectives on Environmental Humanities: Technology, Nature, and Human-Animal Relationships; Interview with Finn Arne Jørgensen

Gašper Raušl

Finn Arne Jørgensen is a professor of environmental history at the University of Stavanger in Norway. He studies the evolution of human relationships with nature over time and place. His latest book, titled *Sharing Spaces: Technology, Mediation, and Human-Animal Relationships* (2024, University of Pittsburgh Press), explores how technology enables and mediates relationships between humans and nature.

How would you summarise what environmental humanities are, their purpose, and where do you see their biggest strengths and weaknesses?

Environmental humanities have fairly recently become a collection of fields. They have longer traditions in separate fields such as environmental history, ecocriticism, and environmental philosophy, which were single-discipline strands asking questions about relationships between humans and the rest of nature. I say "asking questions" because, for environmental historians and the environmental humanities in general, the questions are perhaps more interesting than the answers – in some ways, at least the

Finn Arne Jørgensen. Credit: University of Stavanger

solutions – because we are not necessarily solution-oriented in the same way that some

other disciplines are. What has happened in the last decade or two, particularly since 2014, when a journal called *Environmental Humanities* was launched, is that there has been more cross-conversation between these fields. People have been drawing on methods from different disciplines to fully understand the connections between people, culture, nature, and so on. While I call myself an environmental historian, I draw on methods and inspirations from many other fields – literature, for sure, and also media studies. I was originally trained in science and technology studies, though with a historical focus. So, that is basically how I would define environmental humanities. It's a very broad field; it's not necessarily a discipline with strict gatekeeping, I would say. Now, there are increasingly new programs at universities and different journals – not just the *Environmental Humanities* journal, which, for full disclosure, my wife is a co-editor-in-chief of. There are also other disciplines focusing on and building on environmental scholarship and publishing work in the field. Perhaps a weakness of environmental humanities is that I don't necessarily think the field can offer discrete solutions to problems. I don't necessarily think that is our role, either. One of my approaches is that most, if not all, environmental problems we are facing at the moment are fundamentally cultural challenges and cultural problems. We already have the knowledge and technical solutions to address many of these issues, but the reasons we haven't implemented them are cultural. It's about values, politics, interests, and so on. This is why we need the humanities and social sciences. We need people working together to understand how and why people act the way they do.

What strikes me most about environmental humanities is how they examine the social structures underlying environmental debates. Are these social structures separate from environmental ones?

I'm not sure they're really separate. Much work in the field also tries to address the more-than-human and how these are interconnected. Humans are only one set of actors, and there are huge variations even within the group of humans. It's not as though all humans share the same approach, opinion, influence, or responsibility for what's happening. This idea is central to the Anthropocene debate – not all people are equally responsible, and not all people experience the consequences in the same way. The more-than-human perspective includes not only other species, which I find fascinating, but also other types of actors and constraints, such as non-organic influences. For instance, some scholars study stones, sand, and even how people live with weather. While humanities as a discipline is rooted in understanding the human, it should not view humans in isolation from the rest of nature. It has also become clear that we are at a point in history where things are on fire – both literally and metaphorically. I think the growth of environmental humanities reflects this reality. It's more than just an interest; it's a conviction shared by many humanities and social science scholars, as well as those in the natural sciences, that these issues – specifically the relationships between people and the rest of nature – are the most pressing challenges of our time. We need to build on our scholarship, our skills, and our expertise to speak about these issues and ask critical questions

about this relationship, and not view them as separate but as mutually influenced.

You used historical analyses to understand the environment, particularly focusing on how technology enables and mediates the relationship between nature and culture. Could you tell us more about the role of technology in your research?

I see technology as something that mediates, a concept I've explored in several publications. By this, I mean that technology fundamentally exists between people and the rest of the world. There isn't really a way to relate to the world without these mediating layers. We always experience some form of technological mediation. For instance, the most basic example is that we wear clothes to go outside. You and I both wear glasses to see. These are technologies that fundamentally shape how we relate to the world. Beyond these basics, there are layers upon layers of technologies that connect people to the world. This is not a neutral process. Often in public and academic discourse, when people write about technologies, they do so in moralising ways. For example, they may claim that new technologies have destroyed the relationship between people and nature, arguing for a return to more authentic, supposedly unmediated ways of engaging with the world. However, looking at this historically, you see that the technologies people now consider "authentic" were once viewed as intrusions – disruptions to the way people related to the world. This isn't limited to nature; it applies to many aspects of life. Take books, for example. Excessive reading was once criticised as harmful, as it distracted people from where their attention was "supposed" to be. Every generation, in some way, establishes its baseline for what it considers natural – or perhaps authentic – ways of relating to the world. Deviations from that baseline are often viewed negatively. While this is a general statement, I do believe it holds true.

Does the relationship between humans and nature change when technology becomes the primary mediator?

I would say it does change, though not necessarily for the better or worse. Sometimes it improves, other times it worsens, but there is always change. Interestingly, there are also instances where stability persists through technological shifts. As a historian, that is a fascinating area to explore. For example, why do certain stories about people and nature remain consistent during periods of technological change? This is something I've explored in my work on the Norwegian cabin. The concept of having a home in nature is deeply ingrained in Norwegian culture. The cultural narrative surrounding life at the cabin – its activities, the relationships with nature – has remained remarkably stable. In a sense, it focuses on the authenticity of the experience, even as the cabin itself has undergone significant structural changes. Perhaps people emphasize this narrative because there is no longer a strong material or technological connection to the cabin itself.

Can technology offer a more engaged approach to environmental humanities in general? And can it reshape how people interact with the environment?

Absolutely, and we see many examples of this. Technology and digital platforms can open up nature to people in ways that previously required specialised knowledge and belonging to certain social networks – not the digital kind, but human connections, where you learned how to behave, where to go for walks, or which places are worth visiting. Here in Norway, we have a great app on our phones that highlights everyday walks in nature. These were places we would never have discovered otherwise, because you wouldn't know about them unless someone showed you. In this way, technology has enabled discovery and made experiencing nature more accessible. It lowers the threshold for engaging with the natural world. However, there's a flip side. Platforms like Instagram have contributed to overexposing certain places. Too many people are drawn to these locations, and many try to experience them in a way they've learned through social media, often by taking the same iconic photos. When people are more interested in being seen experiencing something rather than actually experiencing it, that's not my idea of fun.

Recently, you published the book *Sharing Spaces: Technology, Mediation, and Human-Animal Relationships,* published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. Could you share what motivated this project for you personally and what guided your research on the use of GPS-equipped dog collars in moose hunting in Swedish forests?

This project has taken quite a long time to develop. It grew out of a workshop

Re-photography researce technique.
Credit: Malin Kristine Graesse

we held in 2018, so several years ago, where we gathered a group of people interested in exploring how technology enables specific spatial relationships between humans and animals. We focused on how technologies blur the boundaries between human spaces, animal spaces, and the distinction between people and animals. What I was specifically interested in was the use of GPS-equipped dog collars in hunting. I was looking at GPS technology, and I used hunting as a case study. I started by analysing hunting magazines, which have been published monthly for many years. I noticed a surprising trend: around 2008–2009, something shifted in the imagery. Suddenly, all the dogs in the magazine photos had antennas – these were GPS collars with antennas – but the articles didn't mention them at first. Later on, they began to address the technology as it became a more established practice. I became really interested in how hunters were integrating this new technology into their traditions

and practices. How did they negotiate its place within their values and habits? What I found fascinating was that many hunters saw using the GPS to track dogs – on their cell phones, no less – as somewhat of a form of cheating. There was a belief that hunters should give the moose a fair chance, and relying too much on technology made it too easy. I did fieldwork in Sweden in a forested area with a hunting team from the Swedish Agricultural University. These were people I knew from other contexts, and while it can be difficult to gain access to a hunting team, these were academics who understood what I was trying to explore. They, like many other teams, used the technology, but they believed their way of using it was the "right" way, the better, more appropriate way compared to others. This sense of distinction was not limited to GPS usage but extended to their overall hunting practices, which reflected their values and expertise. One thing that really surprised me was how hunters speculated about the evolutionary shift in dogs due to the introduction of GPS. Before, hunters had to breed dogs that would bark in specific contexts to help them understand the dog's location and actions. The barking served as a key part of reading the landscape. With GPS technology, however, the barking is no longer as necessary because hunters can now track their dogs' movements directly on their phones. This shift in how they interact with their dogs – and with the landscape – is really interesting.

How do hunters in Sweden view the use of GPS technology with their dogs, and what role does it play in their hunting practices and relationship with the animals?

Hunters talk about how you can't let the dog know that you know where it is via the GPS. They specifically mention this because one of the key things in training a dog is making sure it will come back to you. If not, you could lose your dog, and people form close relationships with their dogs. They're not just tools; they're almost like family members. This makes the relationship very emotional for the hunters. One story that came up was about a dog that figured out that if it didn't return, the hunters would come find it and bring the car, which was nice and warm. So the dog became a bit spoiled by the discovery that the hunters could always track it. While the hunters always knew where the dog was, they had to make sure the dog didn't know this so it would still come back. However, I certainly noticed a lot of anxiety around the idea of the dog not coming back. Part of this anxiety stems from the fact that there have been cases of wolves attacking dogs, as wolves will often attack dogs they encounter. This happens with some regularity. So hunters use the GPS collars as a form of security, allowing them to track their dogs. The situation can get complicated when the dogs follow a moose. This is particularly problematic if the moose manages to escape the group of hunters and leaves the designated hunting area. In the type of moose hunting I observed, each hunting team has a specific area where they are allowed to hunt. Since many people are moving around with guns, maintaining discipline and controlling where people are positioned in the landscape is crucial to ensure safe shooting directions. This is another skill they pride themselves on – they have mastered it and are good at it. However, if the moose manages to escape and enters an-

other team's hunting area, the dog will follow. This creates the need for negotiations. The hunters will need to contact the team in the other area to see if they are hunting that day and whether they can enter to retrieve the dog. Safety is paramount because there are guns involved, so it's a dangerous situation. If your dog runs off into another team's area, it essentially means you can write off the rest of the day, as retrieving the dog becomes the priority. But hunting with dogs is nevertheless very much about the meat, which is common in both Norway and Sweden. Some people do it for the trophies, but the main focus is on filling up the freezer with meat. There's also a kind of trading economy where moose meat is shared with others. Moose are large animals, and there's a lot of meat to be had. I've been up close to moose at farms in northern Sweden, where they breed and milk them to make moose cheese. But there was something particularly special about the hunt I participated in. They did shoot a moose, and I was part of the group that reached it first. Even though it wasn't the biggest moose they'd ever seen, it was still huge. We had to turn it over to inspect the bullet hole because if it punctured the stomach, emergency butchery was needed to prevent the meat from spoiling. Just being there, seeing and smelling the moose, was fascinating. They smell like sweat, and smell is something you don't often experience as a historian. In archives, you typically smell paper. But doing fieldwork and connecting what I read in historical sources to current practices is really important. Being in the field, understanding the relationship between historical traditions and contemporary practices, has become very meaningful to me, and it will continue to be.

Together with Dolly Jørgensen, you established the Greenhouse Research Center at the University of Stavanger. One of its goals is to cross-pollinate theoretical insights from various disciplines, including history, literature, media, religion, philosophy, and art. In your view, how does interdisciplinarity help us better understand environmental issues?

I think part of the reason for this is that many of the environmental problems we face today are so-called "wicked problems", meaning they don't have simple solutions because they are interconnected with so many other issues. To understand and address these problems, we need to draw on a wide range of skills, disciplines, and ways of understanding the world. While there are certainly some multi-talented individuals who can tackle these problems on their own, most of us need to collaborate with others who possess different expertise in order to have meaningful conversations. It's important that we help each other grow and become better, more skilled scholars. However, learning to work together takes time. It's like any relationship that must be nurtured and developed over time, especially when it comes to creating a shared language. This is one of the goals of the Greenhouse, but it's always a challenge. Anyone who has worked at a university knows how big the divide can be between departments or even between buildings on the same campus. The Greenhouse name itself holds some interesting metaphorical connotations. A greenhouse is a place where things can grow and be sheltered, and that's something we really emphasize: the community we support within the

Greenhouse is one where scholars can come together, work, and discuss ideas. But there's also the idea of the "greenhouse effect", which reflects the increasing urgency we feel about the environmental crises we are facing. The idea of the greenhouse highlights not only growth but also the rising heat – we are in a place where things are getting hotter, and we need to find ways to address that. And I think that interdisciplinarity can certainly help us achieve our goals. But it's not just about having a conversation across disciplines; it's about shaping the kinds of questions we ask and the solutions we propose. I also believe that historical consciousness is vital in this process. Too often today, when people try to address problems, especially in fields like innovation and technology, they reinvent the wheel, sometimes making past solutions worse. Instead of simply replicating old methods, we need to ask why those solutions were abandoned in the first place. What were the fundamental issues? Societies don't work in isolation from technologies, and in order for technologies to work effectively, we must consider values, support systems, and the broader context.

Lastly, what advice would you give to young scholars interested in studying topics related to environmental humanities?

This could go in many different directions, but one thing I'd say is that if you want to pursue a career in academia, it's becoming increasingly difficult. The conditions for doing academic work are getting worse in many places, and securing permanent positions is harder than ever. Those permanent jobs that do exist can be quite challenging in various ways. To succeed, you need to learn how to survive in an academic world that is increasingly driven by grant writing. In Europe, at least, funding your own research has become essential. On the one hand, if you're good at grant writing, you can fund and pursue a lot of cool, interesting projects. But there is also a downside to this, particularly the "projectification" of research. This approach shapes the kinds of questions researchers ask, and often results in research that is more rushed and short-term. Many of the defining questions in the field come from American scholars who have tenure, allowing them to spend ten years to work on a book – something that is rare in Europe. I think this is a challenge we all need to address: we must create conditions that allow us to slow down and produce really high-quality work. Beyond these practical considerations, there are still many opportunities for scholars to engage in environmental humanities. However, it's crucial to seek out and build community. Contribute to the communities you want to be part of, and build meaningful networks with others who share your interests.

Prevajalci poezije na razpotjih in stičiščih kultur

Poetry Translators at the Crossroads and Intersections of Cultures

Jana Rajh Plohl

IZVLEČEK

Članek se ukvarja s prevajanjem poezije, s praksami prevajalcev in njihovimi izzivi ob prevajanju, pri tem pa analizira prevodoslovne koncepte ter jih povezuje s področji kulturne in lingvistične antropologije. Raziskuje različne vidike in procese prevajanja poezije, s pomočjo katerih avtorica obravnava vprašanja o vlogi prevajalca, neprevedljivosti poezije, vplivu prevoda na jezik in o tem, kako lahko prevod prispeva k medkulturnemu razumevanju.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: prevajanje poezije, prakse prevajalcev, neprevedljivost, prevodoslovje, lingvistična antropologija

ABSTRACT

The article deals with the translation of poetry, the practices and challenges of translators, analysing certain concepts of translation studies and linking them to the fields of cultural and linguistic anthropology. It explores the various aspects and processes of poetry translation through which the author discusses the role of the translator, the untranslatability of poetry, the impact of translation on language, and how translation can contribute to intercultural understanding.

KEYWORDS: poetry translation, translation practices, untranslatability, translation studies, linguistic anthropology

Izhodišče za antropološko obravnavo prevajanja poezije in praks prevajalcev sta besedna igra pesnika in literarnega teoretika Borisa A. Novaka (2011: 7), da je prevajanje poezije bolj kakor *salto mortale* (skok v smrt) *salto immortale* (skok v nesmrtnost), ter trditev etnologa Valdimarja Hafsteina (2004: 310), da »s pojmovanjem posnemanja kot ustvarjalnega dejanja (in nasprotno, ustvarjanja kot dejanja reprodukcije) spodkopavamo logiko, ki ju postavlja v nasprotje«.[1] Ob zavedanju, da je prevajanje beletristike, še posebej poezije, zahtevno in večplastno, sem skozi prizmo kulturne in lingvistične antropologije raziskovala, kako se v posnemanju izvirne pesmi načenjajo razmisleki o inovativnih pristopih prevajalcev.

Raziskava temelji na šestih poglobljenih polstrukturiranih intervjujih z izbranimi prevajalci in prevajalkami poezije: s poklicno in nagrajeno prevajalko Nado Grošelj, dijakinjama Našo Kolenik in Tatjano Kobe, ki sta sodelovali pri projektu Sing-a-Vision, v okviru katerega sta prevajali iz latinščine, zakoncema prevajalcema Darinko in Fawzijem Abderjem Rahimom, ki sta izdala dvojezično zbirko arabsko-slovenske poezije *Do kdaj* (2021), ter mlado prevajalko in pisateljico Liu Zakrajšek. Poleg intervjujev in diskusij o(b) konkretnih prevodih sem spremljala spletne in medijske objave o prevodoslovnih tematikah, ki sem jih zasledila na Tretjem programu RTV SLO, zlasti v oddajah *Ars Humana*, na literarnih spletnih straneh Poesis.si in Pesem.si ter na portalu Društva književnih prevajalcev Slovenije, ter se udeležila nekaterih javnih dogodkov, ki se ukvarjajo s predmetom obravnave, na primer Umetna inteligenca v kulturi: UI in prevajanje.

PREVODOSLOVNA VEDA V DIALOGU
S KULTURNO ANTROPOLOGIJO

Za razumevanje sveta prevajalcev poezije je ključno poznavanje temeljev prevodoslovja, interdisciplinarne vede o prenosu pomena ob upoštevanju kulturnih značilnosti. Preizprašuje pojem prevajanja, ki ga lahko razumemo kot »namensko interkulturno interakcijo, pri kateri prevajalec dolguje obema stranema« (Pokorn 2017: 14). Poseben izziv pri prevajanju poezije je vprašanje neprevedljivosti, ki lahko nastane zaradi pomenske gostote, kulturnih elementov in različnih simbolnih vrednosti besed. V tem kontekstu lahko o jeziku razmišljamo tudi s perspektive (simbolne) antropologije, ki ga razume kot sestavni del simbolnega sistema kulture (Geertz 2019). S tem v mislih prevodoslovje umeščam v dopolnjujoč dialog s kulturno antropologijo, kar omogoča širši razmislek, ki presega zgolj fokus na obravnavano temo.

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V pričujočem članku predstavljam izbrane vsebine seminarske naloge pri predmetu Seminar iz splošne etnologije, urbanih, sodobnih in tradicionalnih načinov življenja (izvajalk izr. prof. dr. Mateje Habinc in doc. dr. Ane Svetel), ki je v študijskem letu 2023/24 vsebinsko temeljil na konceptu ustvarjalnosti.

Prevodoslovna veda se je začela oblikovati v šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja s prispevki avtorjev, kot sta Eugene A. Nida in John C. Catford, ki sta razmišljala pod vplivom tedanje jezikoslovne paradigme. Ta, pod vplivom teorije univerzalne slovnice Chomskega, vidi vse jezike kot podobne v svojih globinskih strukturah (Pokorn 2017: 12).[2] Teorija tako podpira koncept simetrične enakovrednosti, ki trdi, da množica enakovrednih ali skoraj enakovrednih stavkov izvirnega jezika ustreza podobni množici stavkov v ciljnem jeziku, zaradi česar sta izvorni in ciljni jezik sploh prevedljiva (Nida 1964). Ob temeljnih delih prvih prevodoslovcev sta se vzpostavila tudi dva pristopa do jezika pri prevajanju: instrumentalni in hermenevtični. Instrumentalni koncept pri prevajanju predstavlja način komuniciranja objektivnih informacij, ki izraža misli in pomene, kjer se pomeni nanašajo na empirično realnost ali obsegajo pragmatično situacijo. Drugi, hermenevtični, pa poudarja interpretacijo, ki jo sestavljajo misel in pomeni, kjer slednji oblikujejo realnost, interpretacija ustvarjalnih vrednosti pa je privilegirana (Rosman in Rubel po Venuti 2003: 6).

Skozi desetletja se je prevodoslovje razvijalo in odmikalo od zgolj jezikoslovnega pristopa k interdisciplinarnim raziskavam, ki vključujejo sociološke in antropološke koncepte, kot sta habitus po Bourdieuju (Pokorn 2017: 18) in emski pogled prevajalca (Pokorn po Simeoni 2017: 20). Trenutne smernice, ki se izražajo v postprevajalskih študijah (Arduini in Nergaard 2011: 8), raziskujejo prevajanje z vidika kompleksne interdisciplinarnosti, vključno s sodelovanjem s kulturno antropologijo, ki je skorajda neločljiva od prevajanja, vendar do pred kratkim ni pristopala k njegovemu sistematičnemu proučevanju (Rosman in Rubel 2003: 1). Globlja, kompleksnejša teoretizacija prevajalskega procesa prihaja v ospredje tudi med antropologi, ki razširjajo ožja pretekla antropološka zanimanja za prevajanje (Tihanyi 2004: 793).

V antropološkem kontekstu je pomembno poudariti vlogo jezikoslovja in osrednji pomen jezika v kulturi, ki ga je v prvi polovici 20. stoletja utemeljil ameriški antropolog Franz Boas. Zagovarjal je zbiranje etnografskega gradiva v maternem jeziku proučevane skupnosti, s čimer je omogočil globlje razumevanje kulture in njenega jezika (Rosman in Rubel 2003: 2). Posledično se je v naslednjih letih razvila tudi teorija njegovega učenca Edwarda Sapirja in Benjamina Leeja Whorfa, ki sta skovala Sapir-Whorfovo hipotezo, ki zagovarja idejo, da ljudje, ki govorijo različne jezike, živijo v »različnih svetovih« (Rosman in Rubel 2003: 12). Tukaj govorimo o (danes preseženem) jezikovnem determinizmu, ki izpodbija in onemogoča teorijo Chomskega, s tem pa preprečuje zmožnost uspešnega prevajanja.

Nezanemarljivo področje, ki predstavlja stičišče obeh ved, je razmerje moči v povezavi z jeziki. Po mnenju lingvističnega antropologa Josepha Erringtona je, v nasprotju z nekaterimi lingvisti, jezikoslovje, vključno s prevajanjem književnosti, globoko vpleteno v »kolonialistični projekt osvajanja in nadzora« (Ahearn 2017: 286). Ob tem ne gre za enostranske

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Nida je v svojem temeljnem delu *Toward a Science of Translating* [Proti znanosti prevajanja](1964) predstavil koncept dinamične ekvivalence. Pri tem načinu prevajanja je v ospredju učinek prevoda na ciljno občinstvo. Opira se na idejo Chomskega o univerzalnih strukturah jezika – te naj bi po njegovem spadale v globinske strukture jezika, medtem ko so površinske strukture konkretne oblike jezika, ki se pri prevajanju prilagajajo. Catford je v svojem delu *A Linguistic Theory of Translation* [Jezikoslovna teorija prevajanja] (1965) skušal opredeliti prevajanje kot proces zamenjave jezikovnih elementov iz enega jezika z enakovrednimi elementi v drugem jeziku. Njegov pristop je analitičen in osredotočen na formalne lastnosti jezikov.

Jana Rajh Plohl

procese, saj so jezikoslovci ustvarjali tudi »uporabno empirično znanje« (Ahearn 2017: 286), vendar niti samega jezika niti proučevanja jezika ni mogoče povsem ločiti od razmerij moči. Globalizacija je ob premisleku v povezavi z medsebojnim vplivom jezikov v sodobnosti bistvena, saj sta se ob njej pospešila migracija in s tem razvoj v komunikacijskih tehnologijah, »ki omogočajo nadnacionalne tokove idej, jezikov in asimetrij«, kar ustvarja »kreolizirane, mešane idiome poliglotizma – torej kompleksne in ustvarjalne mešanice jezikov«, kakor po Jacquemetu navaja Ahearn (2017: 139). Če razmišljamo na podlagi dognanj v zborniku *Translation and Power* [Prevod in moč] (Tymoczko in Gentzler 2007), se prevajanje poezije ne more izogniti tem globalnim tokovom in asimetrijam moči. Izbira jezikov, ki se prevajajo, pogosto odraža prevladujoče geopolitične trende. Poezija iz marginaliziranih jezikovnih skupnosti se lahko sooča s težavami pri doseganju širšega občinstva, medtem ko poezija iz dominantnih jezikov lažje prečka jezikovne meje. To lahko vpliva na prepoznavnost pesnikov, dostopnost njihovih del in na splošno razumevanje različnih kulturnih izrazov. S tem ozirom bi se premaknila na nosilce prakse, prevajalce, ki so, kakor je napovedala sogovornica Nada Grošelj, med seboj zelo različni; nekatere zanimajo klasična dela, drugi iščejo dela z veliko slogovnimi izzivi, tretji se ukvarjajo s sodobnimi jezikoslovnimi dilemami. Ravno zaradi mnogoterosti prevajalcev lahko govorimo o tem, da prevodi še naprej ohranjajo živost kulturnih opcij, o medsebojnem oplajanju jezikov in dejstvu, da manj jezikov pomeni manj znanja v najširšem smislu (Cronin 2003: 75).[3]

KDO SO PREVAJALCI POEZIJE?

Poleg osnovne seznanitve s prevodoslovjem želim podati kriterije, po katerih sem razmišljala o sogovornikih – kdo je torej prevajalec ali prevajalka poezije? V posebno kategorijo prevajalcev se uvrščajo zaradi predpostavke, da naj bi bila poezija glede na druge literarne zvrsti najtežje prevedljiva – o tem so se strinjali tudi vsi moji sogovorniki. Tudi glede na stopnjo profesionalizacije imamo pri njih opravilo s širokim spektrom; od tistih, ki se s prevajanjem preživljajo, do tistih, ki prevajajo laično. Kriterij za opredelitev prevajalca oziroma prevajalke poezije Društvo slovenskih književnih prevajalcev (znotraj katerega se podeljujeta tudi Sovretova in Jermanova nagrada) postavlja kvantitativno: kot člana (če bi se včlanili na osnovi prevajanja poezije) bi namreč sprejelo osebo, ki je prevedla vsaj 1200 verzov (Društvo slovenskih književnih prevajalcev 2024). Seveda pa stroka prepoznava dobre prevajalce poezije s kriteriji nagrajevanja.[4] Sogovornica Grošelj, ki je bila sama večkrat del komisij,

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[3] Na primer kadar se prevaja iz angleščine, se poveča senzibilnost angleščine do tujih, prej neznanih oblik, kot so specifični verzi drugih pesniških tradicij (Fraser 1966: 129). Angleščina pa nato, kakor izpostavlja sogovornica Grošelj, z razvojem (tudi kolonizacijskim) jezika vzajemno ponuja širok nabor besedišča drugim jezikom.

[4] Razširjeno razpravo o sistemih nagrajevanja v Sloveniji sem zasledila v pogovorni oddaji Tretjega programa Radia Slovenija *Ars humana* z naslovom »O literarnih nagradah ali književnost ni šport« (Puljarević 2024). Pogovor je potekal večinoma o nagrajevanju izvirne proze, vendar so gostje oddaje osvetlili tudi teme, vezane na nagrajevalni proces, ocenjevalno komisijo in izbor nagrajencev.

pravi, da je pri delih pozorna na tistega, ki »*zelo poskuša posnemat učinke originala*«. Opise iskanja posebnega učinka in večkrat omenjene besedne zveze *občutka za jezik* lahko povežem tudi z nekoliko starejšo prevodoslovno literaturo, v kateri zasledimo, da naj bi bil dober prevajalec poezije bolj kot izobraženec na področju književnosti tudi sam pesnik oziroma mora imeti »pesniški dar« (Fraser 1966: 130).

Če nekoliko demistificiramo pojmovanje daru – vsi sogovorniki k literaturi in poeziji pristopajo s posebno naklonjenostjo (ali izpostavljenostjo, pozitivnim odnosom) že od otroštva, na mnoge so vplivali tudi družinski člani v ožjem krogu, ki so jim (bili) blizu: dedek Naše Kolenik je književni prevajalec, mama Tatjane Kobe je profesorica latinskega jezika, teta Nade Grošelj je bila tudi sama prevajalka poezije, mati pa je slovenistka ...[5] Sogovornica Grošelj ugotavlja, da kljub spremljanju dela tete ni čutila, da bi sama imela kakšen poseben prirojen občutek za prevajanje: »Jaz sama pri sebi nisem videla, da bi imela kakršenkoli talent. Ali pa da bi se tako, recimo takoj na prvo žogo, spomnila enega res finega izraza.« V mnogih primerih so prišle prve pobude za prevode v študijsko-šolskem okolju, na primer pri seminarju na smeri primerjalne književnosti, s pomočjo delavnic, kot sta Singa-Vision in Prevajalnica JSKD, ali prek drugih projektov, ki spodbujajo prevajalsko prakso. Tovrsten primer so bile dejavnosti v sklopu projektnega društva Rozana, katerega člana sta bila zakonca Abder Rahim, ki je delovalo z namenom približevanja arabske kulture.

<div align="center">

PRAKSE PREVAJALCEV IN IZJEMNOSTI
PREVAJANJA POEZIJE

</div>

Predpriprava: poglobljeno branje in odnos do dela

Ob premislekih o specifiki prevajanja poezije sem se želela seznaniti s postopki prevoda poezije od začetka do konca. Glede na prakse, ki so jih opisali sogovorniki, lahko proces prevajanja poezije razdelimo na tri dele: predpriprava, delovni prevod in prevod, ki pa je do neke mere še zmeraj spremenljiv. V času predpriprave gre za poglobljeno in večkratno branje izbranega besedila. Pred pričetkom miselne ali »duševne« prakse se je prevajanje glede na odgovore sogovornikov izkazalo tudi za materialno prakso, ki se kaže na primer skozi potrebo po natisnjenih listih papirja ali prvem prevajanju v zvezek, kakor navaja Grošelj:

> Moj delokrog ... Morda mi za kakšen krajši tekst zmanjka časa za natisnit ... Ampak drugače pa ja, jaz si to moram natisnit. Mislim, da je slabo za oči gledat v ekran toliko časa. Tako res zbrano gledat. [...] In potem vidim v natisnjenem še vse sorte stvari, ki so bile prej videt čisto v redu na ekranu, zdaj pa naenkrat niso več. [...] Poezijo po navadi tako prevajam, sploh če ima rime, najprej v zvezek in potem to pretipkam. Ampak pri tem pretipkanju jo še tako spreminjam, da mi včasih vzame še ravno toliko časa kot tista prva verzija. Včasih pa tudi ne, in sem zadovoljna že s tisto prvo verzijo.

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[5]
Sogovornica Nada Grošelj jo je v pogovoru tudi posebej omenila, njena teta je bila namreč Marija Javoršek, Sovretova nagrajenka in prejemnica nagrade Prešernovega sklada, ki se je ukvarjala predvsem s francosko književnostjo.

Pri vseh sogovornikih, navkljub generacijski raznolikosti, fizični listi papirja predstavljajo (včasih neobvezen) del prevajalskega procesa. Družno strinjanje o natisnjenih besedilih se je izkazalo predvsem pri prevajanju daljših besedil. V primeru poezije, kjer gre večinoma za krajša besedila, pa so bile prakse mešane – ali je prvo prevajanje potekalo na papir ali pa že od začetka v kombinaciji z računalnikom; odvisno tudi od časovne razpoložljivosti.

Pisateljica Liu Zakrajšek meni, da se moraš z besedilom dodobra spoznati in ob večkratnem branju sprevideti njegovo večplastnost. Gre tudi za osebno izkušnjo, ki se lahko med dvema prevajalcema razlikuje:

> Jaz sem prevajala za Beletrino za Festival vina in poezije od Lily Michaelides poezijo za nek krajši katalog. Potem pa je izšla dejanska knjiga, ki pa jo je ena prevajalka, ena punca, nisem vedela, da tudi ona to počne, jaz pač nisem vedela, da midve iste pesmi prevajava, in potem, ko sem šla gledat, je bilo res ful hecno, ker sta si bila ful podobna najina prevoda, eni pa so bili čist drugi. In to je odvisno od tvojega branja, tega, kaj ti razumeš. Ker vsak človek nekaj drugega vidi v poeziji.

Dijakinja Tatjana Kobe je branje poezije, ki jo oseba želi prevesti, primerjala z eksperimentalnim filmom: »Enako kakor pri eksperimentalnih filmih, ko moraš potem razmisliti o njihovi vsebini, isto je pri prevajanju.«

V fazi predpriprave gre tudi za seznanitev z avtorjevim opusom, da, po besedah Grošelj, »padeš v avtorjev miselni svet«. Na podoben način je razmišljala tudi Naša Kolenik, ki je prevajala v skupini s Kobe: »Zdi se mi bistveno, vsaj meni se zdi, da ujameš avtorjev ritem, stil. Stil, ja. Če je le možno, da prebereš čim več iz repertoarja.« Pomemben je tudi pregled že obstoječih prevodov, vendar Grošelj opozarja, da se sama izogiba branju prevodov pesmi, ki jo prevaja, saj bi jo preveč »zaslepili«.

Delovni prevod: sodobna orodja, družbena angažiranost prevajanja poezije in izzivi (ne)prevedljivosti

Drugi del prevajanja je najbolj raznovrsten. Obstaja sicer nekaj ustaljenih metod dela, ki se pojavljajo v času študijskega procesa; na primer pristop, v katerem se pesem prevede v čim bolj dobesednem smislu, brez ozira na interpretacijo. Nato se postopoma dodajajo plasti, ki naredijo prevod dobro samostoječe delo v drugem jeziku, kot je povedala Zakrajšek. Vendar takšen način dela ni učinkovit za vse, nekoliko posmehljivo se je pojavilo ime prvega prevoda *ChatGPT*[6] *prevod* se pravi prevod, ki spominja na rezultat strojnega učenja, ki ne vključuje poglobitve v pomen.

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[6]
ChatGPT je jezikovni model podjetja OpenAI, ki med drugim omogoča funkcijo prevodov iz nabora jezikov naravnega jezikovnega procesiranja (NLP) velikih jezikovnih modelov (BLM). Zaradi večplastnosti književnih besedil ga prevajalci, vsaj če sklepam po svojih sogovornikih, uporabljajo z določeno distanco. Na enoznačno interpretacijo ob vnosu poezije za prevod opozori tudi program sam.

Na to temo se je pojavila tudi opazka ob preizkusu še dveh orodij za prevajanje, in sicer DeepL Translatorja in Googlovega spletnega prevajalnika.[7] Na primeru DeepL Translatorja je Grošelj poudarila veliko vsebinskih zdrsov pri leposlovnih besedilih, za uspešno prevajanje iz arabščine v slovenščino pa se glede na preostale izkušnje prevajalcev skorajda pričakovano ni izkazal Googlov prevajalnik, kot sta razodela zakonca Abder Rahim. Tudi na dogodku Umetna inteligenca v kulturi: UI in prevajanje je gostja prevajalka Nadja Dobnik omenila,[8] da veliko interpretacij temelji na bazi podatkov angleškega jezika – s tem, tako rekoč jezikovnim etnocentrizmom se izključujejo pogledi zunaj angleško govorečih območij, prav tako pa se s trenutnimi zmožnostmi algoritmov odvzema poudarek človekovega pristopa k prevajanju, pri katerem se povezuje več vrst inteligence (Cronin 2003: 118). Tudi najnovejša strokovna literatura uporabe orodij umetne inteligence (UI) za prevajanje, kot je na primer tematska številka revije *Babel: Literary Translation in the Era of Artificial Intelligence* (Ning in Hongtao 2023), je usmerjena v raziskovanje omejene kreativnosti UI in fenomena neprevedljivosti.[9] Članki poudarjajo predvsem hermenevtičen manko UI, ki vključuje razumevanje ter interpretacijo kulturnega, zgodovinskega in političnega konteksta. Prevajalčeva dovzetnost za naštete (pogosto implicitne) nianse v besedilih pripomore k ohranjanju umetniške integritete prevoda, prav tako pa se s človeškim pristopom lahko bolje premoščajo etične dileme, ki lahko brez poznavanja konteksta privedejo do kulturne apropriacije in spornih reprezentacij. V nasprotju z odklonilnim odnosom do prevajanja literature z UI pa sogovorniki vidijo koristnost orodja pri prevajanju raznih birokratskih obrazcev in formularjev; skratka besedil, ki bi jih lahko umestili v množico del, opisanih v delu *Bulšihti: Teorija* Davida Graeberja (2024).

Nekateri sogovorniki cenijo bolj skupnostni pristop k prevajanju. V pogovoru z Zakrajšek sem izvedela, da si nekateri prevajalci poezije ob dilemah pogosto pomagajo med seboj oziroma se posvetujejo z bolj izkušenimi: »Imajo ta princip, da se med sabo pogovarjajo in si pomagajo. In tudi tako. Jaz skoraj vedno, meni je recimo Boris A. Novak ful pomagal za to poezijo od Linde Gregg. Tako da je vredno, če imaš koga, da ga lahko vprašaš.« Raznolikost prevajalcev kaže množtvo preferenc; Grošelj na primer ne mara deliti svojih delovnih prevodov z drugimi prevajalci, razen morda z mamo, ki je jezikoslovka. Svoje nastajajoče prevode prebira tudi pred spanjem: »Jaz včasih malo berem svoje prevode pred spanjem, ko rabim samo nekaj za odklop. Ker tukaj ni nič novega, kar bi me zbudilo, ker tukaj že vse poznam.«

Sogovorniki omenjajo tudi prostorsko prilagodljivost pri delu prevajanja poezije. Zaradi večinoma krajših besedil se aktivnost prevajanja lahko izvede tudi na vlaku ali avtobusu, kakor opisuje Grošelj:

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[7] DeepL Translator je storitev strojnega prevajanja z uporabo nevronskih mrež, vendar se osredotoča le na prevajanje besedil.

[8] Dogodek je potekal 5. 2. 2024 v knjigarni LUD literatura na Trubarjevi cesti 51 v Ljubljani znotraj cikla pogovorov Umetna inteligenca v kulturi.

[9] Prevod: *Babel: Literarno prevajanje v dobi umetne inteligence* (Ning in Hongtao 2023).

> Za mene prostor prevajanja sploh ni pomemben ... Poezijo se da čisto krasno prevajat kjerkoli. Jaz jo lahko tudi na avtobusu, morda ne ravno na mestnem, tam bi mi bilo slabo. Ampak na kakšnih medkrajevnih pa absolutno, jaz sem kaj prevedla tudi na bazenu, na kakšni klopci ...

Tudi zakonca Abder Rahim sta izpostavila možnost prevajanja na vlaku, poleg prostorske pa sta dodala tudi časovno razsežnost, saj pogosteje prevajata pozimi, ko več časa preživita v notranjih prostorih.

Poleg zapisa se prevajalci ukvarjajo tudi z zvenom prevoda. Zanimivo je, da je tudi v preteklosti za uspešen prevod poezije veljal tisti, ki je dobro poslušljiv na radijskih oddajah (Fraser 1966: 123). V Sloveniji je še zmeraj velik poudarek na prenosu poezije v radijskih oddajah (večinoma na Tretjem programu Radia Slovenije, ARS), kot so *Literarni nokturno*, *Lirični utrinek*, *Izšlo je* ... Glasno branje prevoda je tudi razširjena metoda prevajanja v književnosti v širšem smislu, še posebej, kadar gre za zahtevnejša besedila: »Radka Vrančič pa še ena prevajalka, ki sta prevajali Prousta, sta baje cel prevod naglas prebrali.[10] Zato, da bi videli, kako to zveni. Tako da je velika razlika, ali samo bereš ali tudi govoriš,« navaja Zakrajšek. Takšen delokrog v tandemu utečeno ubirata zakonca Abder Rahim. Ko sem ju obiskala, je Fawzi Abder Rahim spontano prebral eno izmed pesmi v arabščini, ki jo je pred kratkim ustvaril na temo lastnega doživljanja trenutnih razmer v njegovi rojstni državi, Palestini. Po branju arabskih verzov je v slovenščini pričel opisovati vsebino in občutke, ki se pojavijo pri posamičnih verzih: »[prebere verz v arabščini] Pomeni trpljenje na zemlji je že dolgo ... [prebere verz v arabščini] je prihajal čas, da bi odvrgli to ... [si ponovi besede v arabščini], to temo, ne? [...] [prebere verz v arabščini] [P]a te reklame, mislim, ki se ponavljajo ... Je popačeno, ne?«

Njegova žena Darinka Abder Rahim je sočasno začela dopolnjevati moževe misli z iskanjem ustreznih slovenskih besed. Ob opisovanju »ponavljajočih se popačenih reklam« je na primer predlagala besedo propaganda. Za snovanje končne različice prevoda si bo pomagala z arabsko-angleškim in angleško-slovenskim slovarjem ob tesnem sodelovanju z možem. Pogosto on najprej najde prvi prevod izrazov v angleščini, nato pa skupaj iščeta ustreznice v slovenščini. Prevedeta skoraj vsako od njegovih avtorskih pesmi, gre že za neke vrste utečeno prostočasno aktivnost, ki preko jezika dopušča dodatno poglabljanje v raziskovanje in spoznavanje tako arabske kakor slovenske kulture. Tako se je tudi pričela njuna prevajalska pot – že v študentskih letih sta prevajala vrsto pomembnih arabskih pesnikov in pesnic, kot so palestinski pesnik Mahmoud Darviš, libanonski pesnik in pisatelj Khalil Gibran ter iraška pesnica Nazik Almalajka. V njunem primeru je pomembno, da prevedena poezija ne obstaja le kot oblika prevoda, ki jo najdemo v knjižnih izdajah, temveč predstavlja pomemben del družbenih dogodkov. Ob upokojitvi sta nekaj let aktivno delovala v Društvu za kulturo, razumevanje in dialog Rozana (ustanovljenem leta 2009) z namenom približevanja arabske kulture prek umetnosti, zaradi trenutnih političnih razmer v Palestini pa prevedeno in avtorsko poezijo predstavljata na dogodkih z ozaveščevalnim, aktivističnim namenom ter namenom podajanja glasu politično marginalizirani skupnosti (v študijskem

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Radojka Vrančič, slovenska prevajalka in bibliotekarka.

letu 2023/24 sta obiskala na primer Filozofsko fakulteto in Fakulteto za družbene vede Univerze v Ljubljani).[11]

V procesu ustvarjanja delovnega prevoda je ključna prevajalčeva iznajdljivost (tudi igrivost), kar Fawzi Abder Rahim opisuje kot »*vrtenj*e besed okoli«. Glavni težavi pri prevajanju poezije sta iskanje pravega ritma pesmi in razreševanje dilem, povezanih z rimanjem. Vsak jezik se pri tem prilagodi pesmi izvirnika, kar odpira vprašanja o odnosu med prevodom in izvirnikom. Tovrstni pristop k odnosu do prevajanja lahko povežemo z esejem iz dvajsetih let prejšnjega stoletja *Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers* Walterja Benjamina (1972),[12] kjer avtor poudarja ne toliko zvestobo izvirniku, temveč harmonično srečanje jezikov, pri čemer prevajalčeva iznajdljivost pride najbolj do izraza prav pri poeziji. Tu se srečamo z enim od glavnih pomislekov pri prevajanju poezije: ali je sploh prevedljiva?

Sakai opozarja, da ravno proces prevajanja razkrije neprevedljivo: »Prevajanje v ospredje postavi razlike. Spodbuja mišljenje k združevanju zamrznjenih bistev, med katerimi se pojavi neprevedljivo« (2008: 52).[13] Odvisno od pojmovanja prevedljivosti bi se – z nekoliko nerodnosti zaradi vprašanja brez pravilnega odgovora – moji sogovorniki, izvajalci procesa, odločili za neprevedljivost poezije.[14] Ob tem so odpirali teme o občutkih in lastnostih jezikov, ki jih sami doživljajo; tako bi lahko razumeli tudi verz Stanisława Wyspiańskega »Die Sonne nie tak Swieci jak stance« (1904).[15]

Vprašanje neprevedljivosti med drugim skriva že omenjeni odnos med izvirnikom in prevodom, dihotomijo pa lahko prenesemo na odnos med avtorjem (pesnikom) in prevajalcem. Odnos do izvirne pesmi naj bi se kazal kot Proustova magdalenica – prevod naj bi bil stimulant, ki pomaga priklicati izvirnik (Czerniawski 1994: 8), ali pa kot izvedba klasične glasbene kompozicije, pri kateri gre za izbiro, s katerimi glasbili jo bomo izvedli (Czerniawski 1994: 6). Nekateri prevodi se v tolikšni meri razlikujejo od izvirnikov, da bi jim prej kot prevod pripisali oznako priredbe, prepesnitve ali celo avtorskega dela (še posebej, ko vključujejo veliko besednih iger), kot zasledimo v naslednjih dveh primerih, ki jih je opisala Nada Grošelj:

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[11]
Prevedena poezija se pogosto uporablja za namen osveščanja – kot na primer delo prevajalke Katje Zakrajšek, ki se ukvarja z afriškimi literarnimi ustvarjalci in pesniki, ki so pri nas pogosto prezrti. Aktivno pristopa k prevajanju in na portalu Poesis lahko zasledimo izčrpne prispevke ter preglede nagrajenih sodobnih afriških pesnikov (Zakrajšek 2018).

[12]
Prevod: Prevajalčeva naloga.

[13]
Izvirnik: »The work of translation has a way of bringing difference to the fore. It provokes thinking to coalesce around frozen essences between which the untranslatable emerges« (Sakai 2008: 52).

[14]
Poudarila bi, da tukaj ne gre za splošno mnenje, vseeno pa postavlja izhodišče za nadaljnji premislek; še posebej v navezavi s prevodoslovnimi in antropološkimi izhodišči na začetku članka.

[15]
Naslov pesmi in prvi verz enega izmed pionirjev poljskega modernizma Stanisława Wyspiańskega, možen prevod: »Die Sonne ne sije kakor sonce.« Na njegov verz se je naslonil tudi Adam Czerniawski v prispevku o prevajanju poezije *Translation of Poetry: Theory and Practice* (1996). V kontekstu njegove navedbe verza gre za razmislek o razlikah med jeziki in iskanju »drugačnosti« (Czerniawski 1996: 7) v njih.

Jana Rajh Plohl

Pri nas je Alojz Gradnik prevajal kitajske pesnike, te, klasične kitajske pesnike, in seveda ne iz kitajščine, ampak posredno, preko drugih jezikov. Ko so potem videli te prevode, ko je to videl en Kitajec, ki je res razumel slovensko, je rekel, da so to zelo lepe avtorske pesmi.

Pri poeziji ne gre le za iskanje besednih ustreznic, temveč tudi za prevajanje drugih elementov, kot so metafora, stil, obarvanost sloga (vzvišen, surov, komičen ...), rima, ritem, stopica (Czerniawski 1994: 6). Še posebej zanimivo je prevajanje specifičnih metričnih oblik; v arabski poeziji je to na primer zanje klasična 14-delna stopica, ki je zmeraj ni možno ohraniti, je dejal Abder Rahim. Podoben primer, vezan na pesniško sredstvo, in sicer rimo, ilustrira tudi prevod pesmi ameriške pesnice Linde Gregg. Ko mi je Zakrajšek pokazala in prebrala njeno pesem, je izpostavila, da je pri prevodu v slovenščino ubrala nekoliko nekonvencionalno pot in dodala rimo, kjer je prej ni bilo. Prevedeno pesem je skupaj z drugimi izbranimi prevodi, ki so bili prvotno del študijskega seminarja, objavila v reviji *Sodobnost* pod naslovom *Slepeča svetloba* (Gregg 2022: 579–590).

At Home[16]	*Doma*
Far is where I am near.	Daleč, kjer sem blizu.
Far is where I live.	Daleč, kjer živim.
My house is in the far.	V svoji hiši, daleč stran.
The night is still.	Čez noč je mir.
A dog barks from a farm.	S kmetije laja pes.
A tiny dog not far below.	Drobižast pes, nedaleč spodaj.
The bark is soft and small.	Bevsk je nežen in mehak.
A lamp keeps the stars away.	Svetilka rine zvezde stran.
If I go out there they are.	Če stopim ven, poglej, so tam.

Nanašajoč se na zadnja dva verza:

»Če grem ven, tam so.« Ne vem, ne izraža tega presenečenja kot there they are. To, ko rečeš *there it is,* to v bistvu ima neko konotacijo tega, da ti vzpostaviš nekaj, kar je samoumevno. *There it is*, ne? In jaz sem to potem prevedla takole; jaz sem se odločila, da bom naredila eno stvar, ki mislim, da ni v običaju, ni običajna, ampak jaz sem dodala rimo tam, kjer je v angleščini ni. Ali pač, po moje je proti pravilom, prof. Novak je bil drugače ful navdušen in se mi zdi, da sem naredila prav, in dodala sem besedo, ki je v izvirniku ni noter. Ker včasih se moraš malo znajt. [...] Jaz sem to tako prevedla: »Svetilka rine zvezde stran, stopi ven, poglej, so tam.« Poglej – tega ni nikjer tuki, ampak to je bil zame edini način za ohranit ta *twist*.[17]

Z odločitvami, kot so dodajanje besed k verzom in vstavljanje ali odvzemanje pesniških sredstev, se prevajalci nenehno soočajo. Občutek vznemirljivosti ob novem prevodu ohranja motivacijo za prevajanje. Vidimo lahko, da gre poleg izkušenj za nenehno urjenje v inovativnosti in iskanju rešitev.

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[16]
Izvirnik: Linda Gregg, prevod: Liu Zakrajšek.mentorica popravljenega prevoda: dr. Sonja Weiss. Priredba za uglasbitev: Benjamin Virc.

[17]
Iz angl.: presenetljiv preobrat.

Za nekatere je prevajanje poezije tudi dobra vaja v urjenju različnih pesniških sredstev za ustvarjanje avtorskih del, tako je na primer pričel z lastnim ustvarjanjem sogovornik Fawzi Abder Rahim. Seveda je v ospredju tudi namen – predstavljamo si lahko, da je bil v primeru Gradnikovih prevodov *Kitajske lirike* (1958) cilj še vedno predstaviti klasično kitajsko poezijo slovenskim bralcem, vendar je to zaradi večje kulturne, časovne in jezikovne oddaljenosti težavno ter ambiciozno dejanje, ki se je zrcalilo v dojemanju prevodov enega izmed bralcev (odziv kitajskega poznavalca sprejemamo tudi z nekolikšno distanco, saj gre le za eno mnenje).

Primer tanke meje med prevodom, priredbo in avtorskim delom je Grošelj osvetlila v lastnem prevajalskem delu, in sicer pri dvojezični pesniški zbirki poezije Toneta Pavčka *Majhnice in majnice* (2009), kjer je Grošelj prispevala prevode v angleščino. Pri nekaterih pesmih, kot je *Umko*, se je urednica odločila, da jih vključi brez prevoda. Na mestu, namenjenem angleškemu prevodu, je pojasnjeno, zakaj pesem ni bila prevedena. Primer kitice omenjene pesmi in komentarja k neuresničitvi prevoda:

Umko je veleum,
velekljun, velebum,
ljubljenec modrih trum,
znak za razum. (Pavček 2009: 48)

Komentar urednice Gaje Kos: »Pesem Umko ni prevedena, ker se poigrava z nizom podobno zvenečih slovenskih besed« (Pavček 2009: 49).

Nekatere pesmi z vključenim besednim poigravanjem pa so bile vendarle prevedene. Oglejmo si pesem pesem *Besedovanje*, ki je za sogovornico predstavljala posebno preizkušnjo v iznajdljivosti. Pesem je navkljub besednim igram prevedla, vendar je bolj kakor besede izvirnika želela ponazoriti pesnikova slogovna sredstva. Razmerje med izvirnikom in prevodom je po njenih besedah v slednjem primeru vredno preizpraševanja, sama bi jo označila za *skoraj avtorsko*:

Besedovanje[18]

Če biva pek v opeki,
se skriva v mraku rak,
potem je lek v obleki
in v vsakem vlaku lak.

Če je v kravati krava,
v rabarbari barbar,
potem uboga para tava
pod paro in išče par.

Če ton v zatonu tone,
bonton kot roka gre v rokav,
potem je Tonetov na tone
in v vsakem Pavčku pav.

Wording Words

If dumps are found in dumplings,
the main spills through every domain,
and pain through every painting,
and rain through every brain.

If bran is part of brandy,
and rhubarb full of barbs,
a blockhead makes a blockage
and head for other parts.

If tones intone atonement,
and every grouch says Ouch,
then there are tons of Tones,
each Pavček has a pouch.

[18] Pesem Besedovanje (Pavček 2009: 158) in prevod Nade Grošelj Wording Words (Pavček 2009: 159).

Če sede Tone med besede,   When Tone comes to Wordland,
potone v njihov žlak   he settles on the stones
in pase lepih tonov črede   and grazes, for his word stock,
za besedopolni besednjak.   a flock of tuneful tones.

Jaz sem prevajala Toneta Pavčka, *Majhnice in majnice,* in tam je ena pesem, pri kateri gre za čisto besedno poigravanje. Pravi tako v smislu: če je v opeki pek in če je v koraku rak, in potem da en kup enih takih parov, ki v resnici etimološko niso povezani. No, dobro, opeka pa pek dejansko sta, korak in rak pa mislim, da ne … In tam seveda je bilo pri angleščini treba iti na popolnoma druge kombinacije. Takrat sem razmišljala, da je tisto že bolj avtorsko delo. Za neke besedne igre, za neko štosiranje na določenem nivoju v slovenščini, to je že v bistvu bolj priredba kot dobesedni prevod. (intervju, Grošelj, 2024)

Razmislek o razlogih, da določena poezija predstavlja izrazito trd oreh za prevod, se lahko poveže z mnenji večine sodobnih lingvističnih antropologov, da jezik lahko predisponira (se pravi osebo naredi dovzetno za) razumevanje določenega svetovnega nazora – vendar ne na deterministčen način, ki ne bi dopuščal preizpraševanja (Ahearn 2017: 88). Takšen primer je poezija Svetlane Makarovič, ki bi po mnenju Nade Grošelj zaradi vpletanja elementov iz folklornega izročila bila za prevajanje izjemno težavna ali celo nemogoča.

Vendar je ravno izziv nemogočega tisti, ki privlači nekatere prevajalce. Sogovornica Naša je označila prevajanje poezije kot »genialen trening za možgane«, podobno meni tudi sogovornica Grošelj:

Mislim, da mi je všeč ta izziv. Če je pesem dobra, je prevod zmeraj izziv, in ne glede na to, koliko imaš kilometrine. Seveda je to pomembno in hitreje prevajaš, ampak vseeno se zmeraj najde nekaj, vseeno moraš pri vsakem verzu premislit, kako boš to konkretno prevedel, ne moreš nekaj avtomatično štancat.

Pesem avtorja vidi kot uganko, ki jo želi razvozlati in prenesti v drug jezik.

Fortleben pesmi in večplastnost prevodov

V tretji fazi prevajanja poezije gre za dokončanje prevoda. Pogosto ne gre za absoluten konec, saj se prevodi do objave nemalokrat dopolnjujejo in spreminjajo, prevajalci lahko tudi ustvarijo več prevodov istega dela. Po Benjaminu gre za tako imenovano nadaljnje življenje, *Fortleben* dela (1972: 11), kjer je prevajalčeva vloga ta, da podaljša življenjsko dobo besedila, s tem da preoblikuje in prilagodi izvirnik skozi novo lingvistično lečo. Ob tem ne gre za strogo ohranjanje izvirnika, temveč za njegov evolucijski proces in kontinuiteto. Trdnejša zapečatenost prevoda se zgodi, če gre za rok oddaje naročniku ali pa drugo obliko projekta, kot je bila na primer želja po samozaložniški izdaji dvojezične pesniške zbirke prevajalskega tandema Abder Rahim. Če gre za prevajanje, ki izhaja iz lastnega veselja in ni vezano na oddajni rok, se prevajanje lahko precej podaljša; tako je Naša Kolenik predstavila dedkovo prevajalsko aktivnost: »Saj, stvari se prevaja tudi

dve leti. Moj dedek zdaj prevaja *Balado o belem konju*, dve leti jo prevaja že.[19] « Zadovoljiv končni prevod pesmi naj bi nastal predvsem s časom, ki se nameni prevodu, nadaljuje Naša med refleksijo o dedkovem delu: »To rabi čas, to se mora malo marinirat.«

Primer, ki holistično osvetljuje proces, množtvo prevodov in kontinuiteto življenja pesmi, skupaj z opazovanjem instrumentalnega in hermetičnega pristopa k jeziku, je bil gimnazijski projekt Sing-a-Vision (Zavižaj vizijo). Gre za »interdisciplinarni in multilinearni« (Virc, Mezeg, Škorjak 2024: 4) prevajalski projekt, ki združuje poezijo, glasbo in vizualno umetnost. V letu 2023/24 so ga vodili Slovenski prevajalski oddelek Generalnega direktorata za prevajanje, Oddelek za prevajalstvo na Filozofski fakulteti Univerze v Ljubljani in Gimnazija Poljane. Projekt je bil razdeljen na tri faze: prevajanje pesmi, glasbeno interpretacijo in snemanje videospota. Zaključek projekta predstavlja izdajo knjižne zbirke najboljših prevodov in podelitev nagrad na zaključni prireditvi v Hiši EU v Ljubljani (Sing-a-Vision 2024).

Sogovornici Kolenik in Kobe sta s še eno dijakinjo, Julijo Pavlin Vodušek, iz latinščine v slovenščino prevedli še neprevedeno 69. pesem *Carmine Burane*.[20] Najprej so si med seboj ohlapno razdelile naloge; Kobe in Vodušek sta bili zadolženi za iskanje ustreznih besed po verzih, Kolenik pa je pomensko poglabljala in se osredotočila na vsebinske podrobnosti. Pri latinščini je prišlo do problema več pomenov istih besed, prav tako pa so bile problem jezikovne strukture, ki jih ni v slovenščini (na primer deponentniki).[21] Kolenik in Kobe sta o prevajanju iz latinščine dejali, da jezik naslika državo in njene prebivalce ter njihovo dojemanje sveta.[22] Kadar se ukvarjamo z latinščino, dobimo vpogled v zamrznjeno besedišče, pri katerem zaznamo, da se je v rimskem imperiju življenje vrtelo okoli dveh slojev; političnega in kmečkega, sta dejali sogovornici. S tem lahko na prevajanje iz latinščine gledamo tudi kot na prevajanje iz enega v drugo časovno obdobje, ki vzpostavlja dodatno zavedanje o gibkosti sodobnih jezikov. *Tehnični* prevod Kobe in bolj *pesniški* prevod Kolenik sta zaradi časovne omejitve potekala hkrati, s skupnimi močmi pa so prevedle zadnji del pesmi. V različici, ki so jo oddale, so se odločile za nekaj tveganja, saj so uvedle večje vsebinske spremembe; namesto »puščice poželenja« so na primer uporabile »s poljubom«. Za tovrstne razlike so se odločile zaradi občutka *klišejskosti*, ki bi nastal ob prevodu simbola domnevne Amorjeve puščice. Po zaključku delavnice je bil njihov prevod nagrajen in pripravljen za uglasbitev, vendar pa je še ena končna različica nastala mesece po oddaji – ta je ostala v osebnem arhivu. Prevod so želele dodelati zaradi občutka ponotranjenega konteksta, ki je nastal ob razmišljanju o prevedeni ljubezenski zgodbi. V končni knjižni izdaji projekta Sing-a-Vision (Zavižaj vizijo),

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[19] Branko Gradišnik, slovenski pisatelj, kolumnist in prevajalec.

[20] Gre za zbirko srednjeveških posvetnih pesmi, največ v latinščini, nastalih večinoma sredi 13. stoletja, najdenih v benediktbeuernski opatiji. Pod imenom *Carmina Burana* je prvič izšla leta 1847, ko jo je uredil izdajatelj Johann Schmiller, svetovno slavo pa je doživela z istoimensko Orffovo uglasbitvijo nekaterih besedil leta 1936. Izbor in razširjeni izbor pesmi je v slovenščino prevedel Primož Simoniti, nekatere pa so ostale še neprevedene (Beguš 2009).

[21] Latinski glagoli v trpniku z aktivnim pomenom.

[22] Tukaj bi ponovno opozorila na Sapir-Whorfovo hipotezo in teorijo univerzalne slovnice Chomskega.

kjer je objavljenih 45 izbranih prevodov, so poleg izvirnika in dijaškega prevoda dodani tudi prevodi s popravki študentov v sodelovanju z njihovimi mentorji ter še tretja različica prevoda, ki je prirejena za uglasbitev. Iz enega izvirnika so torej nastali trije objavljeni prevodi (ki so po Benjaminu (1972) ustvarili kontinuiteto dela in se jezikovno prilagodili novim okoliščinam), v nekaterih primerih pa tudi več, vendar (še) niso objavljeni.[23]

Izvirnik	Dijaški prevod	Popravljeni prevod	Priredba za uglasbitev
Carmina Burana 69.1–2	*Carmina Burana 69.1–2*	*Carmina Burana 69.1–2*	*Carmina Burana 69.1–2*
1. Estas in exilium iam peregrinatur, leto nemus avium cantu viduatur, pallet viror frondium campus defloratur. Exaruit, quod floruit, quia felicem statum nemoris vis frigoris sinistra denudavit et ethera silentio turbavit, exilio dum aves relegavit. 2. Sed amorem, qui calorem nutrit, nulla vis frigoris valet attenuare, sed ea reformare studet, que corruperat brume torpor. Amare crucior, morior vulnere, quo glorior. Eia, si me sanare, uno vellet osculo, que cor felici iaculo	Poletje je izgubljeno, odslej njega duh potuje, gaj več ne pozna krasot ptičje pesmi in zelena planjava je z listjem odeta, a bleda, oropana svojih cvetlic. Kar nekoč je cvetelo, je zdaj ovenelo, saj je sila hladu svoje zlo razodela, zaplenila blaženost gaja. Spodila je ptice, zrak je trpel v tišini. Vendar ni nobena sila dovolj hladna, da bi oslabila ljubezen, ki neguje plamen strasti, ki edina obnovi, kar brezčutna zima slabi. Hudo sem mučen in grenko trpim, ubija me rana, ki jo sam častim. O, če bi me le ona, ki rada osreči mojo dušo, želela ozdraviti s poljubom.	Že je poletje v izgnanstvo poslano, gaj ne pozna več krasot ptičje pesmi, zelena planjava bledi, oropana svojih cvetlic. Kar nekoč je cvetelo, je zdaj ovenelo, saj je zla sila hladu zaplenila blaženost gaja, in ko spodila je ptice, s tišino je zrak vznemirila. Vendar nobena moč mraza ne more slabiti ljubezni, ki plamen neguje strasti. Ta namreč obnavlja, kar zima brezčutna slabi. Grenko trpim, ubija me rana, ki jo častim. O, da bi ona, ki s puščico blaženo rani mi rada srce, želela me z enim poljubom ozdraviti!	Že je v izgnanstvo poletje poslano, gaj ne pozna več krasot ptičjih pesmi, že bledi planjava zelena, oropana svojih cvetlic. Kar nekoč je cvetelo, je zdaj ovenelo, saj zla sila hladu gaju radost je odvzela in ko spodila je ptice, s spokojno tišino je zrak vznemirila. A moč nobena hladna ni, da oslabila bi ljubezen, ki plamen goji strasti, ki sama obnavlja, kar zima brezčutna kazi. Bridko trpim, ubija me rana, ki sam jo častim. O, če bi me ozdravila z enim le poljubom, ki s puščico blaženo mi srce je ranila

Sodobna prevodoslovna usmeritev, osredotočena na prevajalce, odpira antropologom nove raziskovalne možnosti, saj se tudi sami soočamo s tujimi jeziki in njihovim razumevanjem ter v določenem smislu delujemo kot »prevajalci« kulturnih značilnosti. Vpogled v prakse prevajalcev ter preplet prevodoslovnih in antropoloških pristopov omogočata globlje razumevanje jezikovnih vidikov, ki so pogosto slabše raziskani. Posebej poezija se giblje po vrvohodski niti med *salto mortale* in *salto immortale*, med sprva nasprotujočima si pogledoma na jezik. Ta pogled sega od determinističnih teorij Sapirja in Whorfa do teorije univerzalnih struktur Chomskega. Obe področji sta se razvili v usklajen dialog, ki zdaj razkriva večplastno razmerje do jezika. Prevajalci imajo pri tem ključno vlogo, saj s svojimi praksami, izbiro besedil in različnimi motivacijami za prevajanje zagotavljajo, da besedila dobijo novo časovno dimenzijo in nadaljevanje.

Pogovori s prevajalci poezije so nakazali, da prevajalci kljub raznolikostim izkazujejo skupni lastnosti: ustvarjalnost in inovativnost. Gre za posameznike, ki prakso prevajanja poezije prilagodijo svojemu načinu življenja – nekateri prevajajo v tandemu, kot zakonca Abder Rahim, drugi poudarjajo izmenjavo mnenj, kot sogovornice Zakrajšek in udeleženki delavnice Kolenik in Kobe, medtem ko tretji doživljajo prevajanje kot izrazito samostojno prakso, kot sogovornica Grošelj. Specifika poezije jih sooča z dilemami glede odnosa do prevoda, saj ta ni zgolj jezikovni proces, temveč vključuje poglobljeno razumevanje izvirnega besedila, avtorjevega sloga in kulturnega konteksta. Včasih se meja med prevodom in avtorskim delom zabriše do te mere, da tudi sami prevajalci prevod označijo kot avtorsko delo, kot smo opazili pri primeru pesmi *Besedovanje*. Nejasne meje med avtorskim delom, prevodom in samostojno avtorsko potjo sogovornikov, ki prevajanje uporabljajo kot način usvajanja pesniškega izraza, podpirajo Hafsteinovo začetno misel, da je dihotomijo med ustvarjanjem in posnemanjem vredno postaviti pod vprašaj.

Kljub zahtevnosti pa prevajanje poezije odpira prostor za jezikovno drznost, ki se kaže v premišljenem »uporništvu« do izvirnika – na primer z dodajanjem rime pri sogovornici Zakrajšek ali zamenjavo simbola Amorjeve puščice s poljubom pri dijakinjah Kolenik in Kobe. Druga oblika uporništva se kaže v izbiri jezika in besedil, iz katerih ali v katere se prevaja, pri čemer pridejo v ospredje dinamike moči med jeziki in globalna politika. Zakonca Abder Rahim na primer prevajata tako avtorsko poezijo kot dela sodobnih arabskih avtorjev v slovenščino, s čimer prispevata k premoščanju kulturnih in jezikovnih meja.

Prevajalci poezije odpirajo tudi širša raziskovalna obzorja, ki se nanašajo na družbene kontekste vrednotenja umetnosti (v našem primeru književnosti, tudi z oziroma na nova orodja umetne inteligence), estetike in podobno. Poezija morda ni docela prevedljiva, pa vendar za prevajalce poezije predstavlja neke vrste prijetno Sizifovo delo, kakor je v refleksiji za knjižno izdajo *Sing-a-Vision* nekoliko hudomušno pripomnila Našina in Tatjanina ekipa (Virc, Mezeg, Škorjak 2024: 77): »Prevajanje je torej brezkončen proces, dokler se ti od teksta, ker ga ljubiš in neguješ, ne zmeša in zgabi.«

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INTERVJUJI

(posnetki in transkripti so hranjeni v osebnem arhivu skupaj z dovoljenji za uporabo osebnih podatkov)

Abder Rahim, Fawzi in Darinka, Ruše, 5. 5. 2024.

Grošelj, Nada, Ljubljana, 27. 3. 2024.

Kobe, Tatjana, Ljubljana, 23. 3. 2024.

Kolenik, Naša, Ljubljana, 23. 3. 2024.

Zakrajšek, Liu, Ljubljana, 19. 3. 2024.

SUMMARY

The article examines the complexities of poetry translation, particularly through the lens of cultural and linguistic anthropology. The author conducted interviews with six poetry translators, during which various dimensions of the translation process came to light. The research methodology also included an analysis of literature on (poetry) translation, media discussions, online resources, and participation in relevant events. Firstly, the article underscores the significance of grasping the foundational principles of translation studies as interdisciplinary, with the goal of conveying a comparable meaning while taking cultural subtleties into account. Secondly, it categorises the practices of poetry translators into three distinct phases: pre-translation, draft translation, and final translation. The pre-translation phase entails the extensive and repeated examination of the chosen text and its author. The draft translation phase involves testing various translation strategies, with some translators beginning with literal translations as a foundation. During this stage of the practice, a key question emerges: is poetry untranslatable? The article uses examples to illustrate that the relationship between the original and the translated work offers no simple answers – it's a grey area rather than a black-and-white dichotomy. The final translation phase seeks to produce a refined version that is coherent and complete in the target language, ensuring an afterlife for the original that is moulded to fit through the linguistic lens of the translators. The discussion also touches on the role of AI tools, noting that they frequently fall short in retaining the nuanced interpretation that is an integral part of literary works. In conclusion, the author recognises that poetry translation is often a continuous journey characterised by ongoing refinement and a series of iterations. While the complete translatability of poetry may be a Sisyphean task, the pursuit remains a deeply rewarding undertaking.

Poročilo z mednarodne konference »The Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals: Experience and Conceptualisation«

Simona Kuntarič Zupanc

Od 30. avgusta do 1. septembra 2024 je na Filozofski fakulteti v Ljubljani potekala prva mednarodna konferenca v okviru projekta ERC DEAGENCY z naslovom »The Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals: Experience and Conceptualisation« (Vloga mrtvih v življenju posameznikov v sodobni družbi). Konferenca je izhajala iz predpostavke, da je komunikacija z mrtvimi v sodobnih zahodnih družbah pogosto prezrta ali pa je obravnavana kot »ljudsko verovanje«.

Konferenco je odprla Kaarina Koski s plenarnim predavanjem »The Dead Among the Living: Agency, Intention and Power« (Mrtvi med živimi: Tvornost, namera in moč), v katerem je govorila, kako mrtvi vplivajo na žive, bodisi kot bitja ali prek spominov in zapuščine. Drugo plenarno predavanje, z naslovom »From Peaceful to Restless Afterlife: Encounters with the Dead and Ghosts in Contemporary Estonia« (Od mirnega do nemirnega življenja po smrti: Srečanja z mrtvimi in duhovi v sodobni Estoniji), je pripravil Ülo Valk. Poudaril

je, da so kljub napovedim znanstvenikov o upadu verovanj v nadnaravno ter z razširitvijo racionalizma duhovi in strašenja ostali pomemben del zahodne družbe.

Poleg plenarnih predavanj je tridnevna konferenca vključevala prispevke, ki so
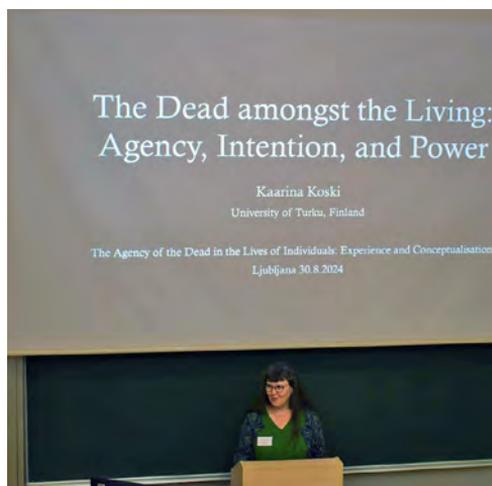
Fotografija 1: Predavanje Kaarine Koski.
(Foto: Simona K. Zupanc, 30. 8. 2024)

bili razvrščeni po posameznih sklopih. V prvem sklopu, *Experience and Conceptualization* (Izkušnja in konceptualizacija), so raziskovalci predstavili, kako ljudje skozi sanje, spomine in simbole ohranjajo stik z mrtvimi. Ágnes Hesz je na primer predstavila, kako individualni pogledi na mrtve na madžarskem podeželju oblikujejo družinski, verski in lokalni diskurz, ter vzpostavila povezave med temi verovanji in spreminjajočimi se družbenimi vrednotami v skupnosti. Podobno sta obravnavala sklopa *Encounters and Communication with the Dead* (Srečanja in komunikacija z mrtvimi) in *Dreams and Visions* (Sanje in videnja), kjer so predavatelji predstavili, kako spremenjena stanja zavesti, kot so sanje, omogočajo komunikacijo z mrtvimi, medtem ko je sklop *Folk Narratives* (Ljudske pripovedi) raziskoval vlogo tradicionalnih zgodb in verovanj pri oblikovanju sodobnih razumevanj smrti. V sklopu Narratives and Practices (Pripovedi in prakse) so predavatelji predstavili, kako

Fotografija 2: Predavanje Nilou Davoudi.
(Foto: Simona K. Zupanc, 31. 8. 2024)

osebne in kulturne pripovedi pomagajo ohranjati spomin na mrtve. Vito Carrassi je na primer razpravljal o katoliških tradicijah, kot sta neapeljski kult *capuzzelle* in molitev »Rožni venec za 100 pokojnih«, ter pokazal, kako ti rituali ohranjajo povezave med živimi in mrtvimi. Sklop *The Popular Culture and the Digital World* (Popularna kultura in digitalni svet) pa je raziskoval, kako digitalne tehnologije preoblikujejo prakse žalovanja in spominjanja. Emese Ilyefalvi je predstavila spletna mesta za prižiganje sveč in spominske spletne strani ter odprla vprašanja o tvornosti digitalnih sledi, ki jih za sabo pustijo pokojni.

Sklop *Memory, Identity, and Materiality* (Spomin, identiteta in materialnost) se je osredotočil na to, kako se spomin in materialna kultura prepletata z identiteto in smrtjo, medtem ko so v sklopu *Rituals* (Rituali) predavatelji govorili o tem, kako različni rituali posredujejo med živimi in mrtvimi. Michal Uhrin se je v svojem prispevku osredotočil na to, kako ljudje doživljajo tvornost mrtvih na podlagi kolektivnih praks, kot so obiski pokopališč, spominske slovesnosti in razni verski obredi. Konferenco smo zaključili s sklopom predavanj pod naslovom *Mass Deaths, Massacres and Human Remains* (Množične smrti, pokoli in človeški ostanki). Raziskovalca Aleksandra Krupa-Ławrynowicz in Sebastian Latocha sta na primer predstavila vpliv katinskega pokola na življenja vdov in sirot ter ugotavljala, kako odsotnost žalnih ritualov in politični tabu okoli pokola oblikujeta njihove biografije.

Konferenca je izpostavila širok spekter načinov, kako mrtvi še naprej vplivajo na življenja posameznikov, ter omogočila interdisciplinarni vpogled v razumevanje vloge mrtvih v sodobni družbi.

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