THE MEANING OF NATIONAL AND CULTURAL BORDERS AMONG THE INHABITANTS OF SLOVENIAN ISTRIA: A CASE STUDY OF ITALO-SLOVENIAN TRANSCULTURALITY

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Introduction

In the last decades, we are witnessing a phenomenon of increased emphasis on the state of "borderlessness." The European integration is trying to focus on "our" common European heritage and territory and to an extent to limit the importance of national borders and the influence of nation-states.[1] Of course, this is true mainly for the space defined as "European." As Morley and Robins point out, Europe is always identifying its "others," which shifted from the "communist" during the Cold War to the Muslims after that time.[2] It could be said that European Union is trying to diminish the meaning of national borders within Europe, as it is widening the Schengen Area and diminishing the controls on national borders as well as fostering the exchange between nation-states.

Furthermore, with the increased migration flows and global interconnections with information communication technologies and otherwise, it seems that national borders are losing their significance. And

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[1]   Steven Castles et al., "Australia: Multi-Ethnic Community without Nationalism?" in *Ethnicity*, eds. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 361.
[2]   David Morley and Kevin Robins, *Spaces of Identity: Global Media, Electronic Landscapes and Cultural Boundaries* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), 98–100.

not to forget all the initiatives "without borders." There are "Doctors without Borders," "Games without Borders," "Europe without Borders," referring to the diminished border controls within Schengen Area and also to the single charge by mobile phone companies across the European Union. There is also a festival, "Puppets without Borders," a street festival that took place in Slovenian Istria and Udine, a town in Italy, across the national border. And not to forget the financial aspect: the prevalence of introduction of Euro, the common currency. So, when everything is becoming without borders, one begins to question why all this emphasis on "borderlessness." And is it truly the reality we live in? We could see with the events of the so-called "migration crisis" that national borders are of great significance, even within the European Union and the Schengen Area. For example, in Slovenia and other countries, barbed wire, officially referred to as obstacles, were put on the national border.

The importance of national borders and, of course, also nationalism is visible in everyday practices of individuals, in the "banal nationalism," as Michaell Billig[3] calls it, since it is so omnipresent and obvious that we do not acknowledge its existence anymore – and not because it is "benign." The paper thus discusses the relationship of the (trans) cultural practices and self-identification of the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria.

Cultural and Historic Context

Slovenian Istria is a border area in south-west Slovenia that is bordering two nation-states: Italy on the north-west and Croatia on the south. Similarly as other border areas and nation-states, the area of Slovenian Istria was multicultural already in the past:[4] In the 18th century, three

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[3]   Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1995).
[4]   Miran Komac, "Varstvo 'novih' narodnih skupnosti v Sloveniji," [The Protection of 'New' National Communities in Slovenia] in *Razprave in gradivo: Revija za narodnostna vprašanja* [Treatises and Documents, Journal of Ethnic Studies] 43 (2003): 6–33; Vera Kržišnik Bukić, "Migracije iz drugih jugoslovanskih republik v Slovenijo po 2. svetovni vojni," [Migrations from Other Yugoslav Republics to Slovenia after WWII] in *Migracije in slovenski prostor od antike do danes* [Migrations and Slovenian Area since Antiquity], eds. Peter Štih and Bojan Balkovec (Ljubljana, Zveza zgodovinskih društev Slovenije, 2010), 502–505.

major linguistic groups began to form, namely the Slovenian, the Croatian and the Italian, but this did not mirror any national affiliation,[5] rather a class position.[6]

The Slovenian-Italian relations are historically complex.[7] One of the most significant impact was the annexation of the territory to the Italian nation-state with the Treaty of London (1915) (confirmed with the Treaty of Rapallo, 1920) when the inhabitants experienced fascism on a greater scale,[8] which began to change with the capitulation of Italy in September 1943. Slovenians then began to strive to annex the area to Yugoslavia. In May 1945, it was subject to a "diplomatic fight" and firstly the Free Territory of Trieste (with the corresponding Zone A and Zone B) was created.[9] This changed in 1954 with the Memorandum of Understanding of London, which appointed to some extent the modified Zone A of Free Territory of Trieste to Italy and Zone B to Yugoslavia. After the World War II, the darkest era for Italians and others fond of Italy began,[10] which was seen in the arrest and later killings at the Karst pits, called *fojbe* and resulted in the Exodus.[11]

The area of Slovenian Istria thus presented a world where capitalism and socialism met, and where the logic of the Cold War prevailed. The

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5   Although not uncommon that before the national affiliation became the norm, other forms, such as class affiliation, were more common. See Liah Greenfeld, *Nationalism: Five Roads to Modernity* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1992); Zygmunt Bauman, *Identity: Conversations with Benedetto Vecchi* (Cambridge and Malden: Polity Press, 2013 [2004]).

6   Darko Darovec, *Kratka zgodovina Istre* [A Short History of Istria] (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Znanstveno raziskovalno središče, Založba Annales, Fakulteta za humanistične študije, 2008).

7   The presented results are part of the Ph.D. study focusing on Italo-Slovenian transculturation, with special emphasis on Italian media consumption and media culture. Because of that, the paper will present Italo-Slovenian relationships in more detail.

8   Milica Kacin Wohinz, "Badoglio Sonninu: Italijanski načrt za protijugoslovansko akcijo decembra 1918," [Badoglio Sonninu: Italian Plan for Anti-Yugoslav Activities in December, 1918] in *Mikužev zbornik*, eds. Zdenko Čepič, Dušan Nećak and Miroslav Stiplovšek (Ljubljana: Oddelek za zgodovino Filozofske fakultete, 1999), 21; Darovec, *Kratka zgodovina Istre [A Short History of Istria]*, 221.

9   Darovec, *Kratka zgodovina Istre [A Short History of Istria]*.

10   Milica Kacin Wohinz and Nevenka Troha, eds., *Slovensko-italijanski odnosi 1880–1956: Poročilo slovensko-italijanske komisije* [Slovenian – Italian Relations 1880-1956: the Slovenian-Italian Commission Report] (Ljubljana: Nova Revija, 2001), 53.

11   Darovec, *Kratka zgodovina Istre [A Short History of Istria]*.

Italo-Slovene exchange was further enabled by the new political system in Yugoslavia: in the 1960s a more liberal and open political regime was introduced and, consequently, the borders to the West were partially opened and the visas abolished.[12] This represented the specific among socialist states and it enabled its inhabitants to have (regular) economic and cultural exchanges with the Western World, specifically Italy.[13] By the end of the 20th century, national borders were becoming even more open, until, in 2007, Slovenia entered the Schengen Area. At that time, even the border controls were abolished.

Methodology of Empirical Research

The outlined theoretical background of transculturation, and to some extent the meaning of (national) borders were the foundations for an elaborate empirical research, which was the essential part of the dissertation.[14] The results presented in the paper are just a part of the study on media consumption in Slovenian Istria, with special emphasis on Italian media, nationalism and transcultural practices, as they cover an area too wide. Therefore, only the ones that illustrate the paper's thematic are used. The research used a two-step sequential model, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods. The combined methodological approach (the so-called mixed methods) is essential for gaining a complete picture of the subject studied. While the quantitative method yielded generalizable data, the qualitative method provided more in-depth, content rich information on the topic.[15] The quantitative part consisted of a telephone survey that was conducted in Octo-

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[12]   Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik, "Introduction: In the Lure of Utopia: Socialists Everyday Spaces," in *Remembering Utopia: The Culture of Everyday Life in Socialist Yugoslavia*, eds. Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2010), 6.

[13]   Ibid.

[14]   Maja Zadel, "Vloga italijanskih medijskih vsebin in transkulturne identitete na območju slovenske Istre" [The Role of Italian Media Content and Trans-Cultural Identity in Slovenian Istria], Ph.D. diss. (Koper: Univerza na Primorskem, Fakulteta za humanistične študije, 2016), https://share.upr.si/fhs/PUBLIC/doktorske/Zadel-Maja.pdf.

[15]   Daniel Bertaux and Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame, "Life Stories in the Baker's Trade," in *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Science*, ed. Daniel Bertaux (Beverly Hills and London: Sage, 1981), 169.

ber 2014 with 717 respondents (715 when the results were weighted according to age and gender, as two respondents did not state their age). The telephone survey was conducted among the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria, namely the Municipality of Koper, Izola, Piran and the newly formed Ankaran (before part of the Municipality of Koper). The overall gender breakdown was the following: 39.9 % of male and 61.1 % of female respondents. The age breakdown was: 7.3 % between the age of 15 and 25, 12.6 % between 26 and 36 years of age, 14.8 % between 37 and 38, 19.9 % between 48 and 58 and 45.2 % older than 58 years of age.

The qualitative part consisted of 30 life-stories interviews with the informants from the telephone survey.[16] There were 18 female and 12 male interviewees. There were six interviewees in the first, second and third age group, five in the fourth age group and seven in the fifth age group. The interviews were conducted between February and June 2015.

The interview covered the themes of the telephone survey, however the modality of life-history interviews do not allow us to reproduce exactly the same questions in all the interviews or to copy them from the questionnaire. That is why the telephone survey used a stratified random sampling, which made the generalisations to the whole population possible and it enabled the analysis of statistically significant correlations. The scope of life-story interviews, however, was to get a more complete and detailed insights with the depiction of the feelings, motivations, etc. of the informants (this way the quotes from the interviews also used in this paper).

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[16] All the informants were supposed to be picked from the telephone survey, but there were some problems getting the younger informants, so three informants from the qualitative study did not participate in the quantitative research.

Borderlessness, National Borders and Nationalism

As we are told, our lives today are less bound to our immediate surrounding than in the past.[17] Already in 1986, Joshua Meyrowitz in his book *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behaviour* stated that because of media and new technologies we are more connected globally than ever before: we are witnesses or, better said, "direct audiences" to performances and events that happen in other places. In that sense, we altered the way we feel participant and we began to express ourselves in ways of being present; for the events that we saw on television now we feel we witnessed them.[18] Meyrowitz points out the assassination of Lee Harvey Oswald,[19] but we can find more recent examples, one of which is surely the 9/11.

Although it is easy to agree with Meyrowitz – we are, in fact, more globally connected than ever before – but that does not mean we are no longer bound to the place where we live. And of course, we must not underestimate the role of nationalism.[20] Therefore, even though we are globally connected, we still do not forget our nationality. According to

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[17]   Morley and Robins, *Spaces of Identity*; Zdravko Mlinar, *Individuacija in globalizacija v prostoru* [Individuation and globalization in space] (Ljubljana: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, 1994).

[18]   Joshua Meyrowitz, *No Sense of Place: The Impact of Electronic Media on Social Behavior* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[19]   Ibid., vii.

[20]   Nationalism is a very contested term. In general, it is defined as the ideology that presupposes the congruence of the national (cultural) and political unit, but it is also the political principle that creates also sentiments and movements; see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca and New York: Cornell Paperbacks, 2008 [1983]), 1. Hobsbawm, another theoretician in the field of nationalism, is trying to define "nations". He observed that different definitions include "objective criteria" such as common language, ethnic affiliation or a combination of criteria, i.e. common language, territory, history and cultural characteristics. But, as Hobsbawm points out, these definitions are made *a posteriori* to include all the entities we call nations; see Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nacije in nacionalizem po letu 1780: Program, mit in resničnost* [Nations and Nationalism after 1780: Program, Myth and Reality] (Ljubljana: Založba /*cf, 2007 [1990]), 12–13. Michael Billig also stressed a very interesting point: nationalism is usually something we ascribe to others, while we have a benign *patriotism*. That is why he introduces the notion of "banal nationalism"; to include all the small, everyday practices that reproduce and enable the system of worldwide accepted division into "nation-states". In the article I will use Billig's the broad definition as it most thoroughly points to the difference between nationalism and cultural identity; see Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

Michael Billig, there must be some sort of mechanism to sustain the current system of nation-states, but it is so omnipresent that it became obvious and consequently invisible that we do not notice it anymore – it is like the hum of distant traffic.[21] We are daily reminded with the "flagging of our homeland" and are subject to different "banal" practices – that is why Billig calls it "banal nationalism". We are daily reminded not only by national flags, but also with "our" "national heroes" on our national currency, politicians' speeches, and not to forget the deixis in everyday news, where the words "the" and "here" set our context to the commonsensical national context. For example, "the" economy is "our," "national" economy, "the" Prime Minister is the Prime Minister of "our" nation-state, "the" news is "our," "national" news, while "foreign" news regards other nation-states.[22]

As mentioned before, on the one hand, we feel globally connected and the place we live in defines us less than in the past, but, on the other hand, we still do not forget our national identity. Even more, we still want to define ourselves in national terms and the national identity is important to us, regardless of our cultural practices that, we could say, cross the national borders. Of course, I am not stating that there exists something as a "national culture"[23] that is bounded by national borders, but in the minds of individuals, national subjects, it does. I argue that the so called "national culture" is in fact a mixture of different elements, but in the process of unification of the nation-states it became to be understood as a culture of a specific *Volk* (the German word for simple people, people in the ethnic sense, and also nation),

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[21]   Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 94–159.
[22]   Ibid., 108.
[23]   We can surely agree with Welsch that societies nowadays are "multicultural" in themselves (not just in the multinational or multi-ethnic aspect) – we must not forget the vertical differences in a given society. For example, the difference between the working-class segments and upper-middle class, youth subcultures, etc. Not to mention the horizontal differences: gender, sex orientation, etc. Welsch also points out that lifestyles and cultural practices do not stop at the national border, but rather cross it: the lifestyle of an academic or a journalist in France is more similar to his/her colleague in Germany than to his/her fellow citizens from a different sphere of vocational engagement, which also defines a part of their culture. See Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today," in *Spaces of Culture: City, Nation, World*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash (London: Sage, 1999).

with its own history and bounded from others, as Herder argued.[24] However, in the understanding of individuals, such cultures do exist. This is why I nevertheless, asked the informants in the survey about "Slovenian culture" and "Italian culture."

That was also one of the research focuses, namely, what is the discrepancy between the cultural practices and lifestyles of informants and their self-identifications. Inhabitants of Slovenian Istria live in the border area, bordering Italy (and Croatia) and following media programmes from Italy was quite common in the area (even more so in the past), especially Italian television programmes, which, a lot earlier than Slovenian television, provided a wide range of commercial programmes and alongside a lot of children's programmes, too. As the informants pointed out, they grew up with the Italian media and were, to some extent, socialized in the Italian popular (media) culture.

One informant, when asked what he has in common with his peers from other parts of Slovenia, peers from Italy and peers from Istria, concerning his peers in Italy, he pointed out:

What regards the Italians [Italian peers, author's note], I probably watched the same cartoons as they did. I knew the same [media] figures as Italians. As, back then, I knew more Italian famous people than Slovenian. I also read, I don't know, Italian magazines, Cioé, when it was in fashion.

(Interviewee 23, m, 33 years)

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[24] For the explanation of this process and Herder's influence on understanding of the notion of culture, see Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today"; Wolfgang Welsch, "Transculturality: the Changing Form of Cultures Today," *Filozofski vestnik* 22, no. 2 (2001 [1992]): 59–86; Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A vocabulary of culture and society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983 [1976]); Bikhu Parekh, *Rethinking Multi-culturalism: Cultural Diversity and Political Theory* (Houndmills, Baingstoke and Hampshire: Macmillan, 2000).

Transculturation

We can see that respondents recognise the transcultural space and transculturality[25] of inhabitants of the border region. In the quantitative part of the research (the telephone survey), the respondents estimated the transcultural practices with five statements on a 5-point Likert scale. There are 73.9 % of respondents who think that "living near the border has been changing the culture of its inhabitants for centuries" and 62.8 % who think that "inhabitants of the border region have adopted some characteristics from the Italians." Half of the informants (strongly) agree that "Slovenians from Slovenian Istria are, according to their lifestyle and mentality, more similar to Italians than to Slovenians from the central Slovenia." However, almost two thirds (strongly) agree that "we are still bound to the national milieu regardless of cultural flows from other countries."

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[25]   It is important to point out that different authors stress the impossibility to specifically define the term culture (see Williams, *Keywords*, 87; Tim O'Sullivan et al., *Key Concepts in Communication and Cultural Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006 [1994]), 68) and other concepts related to it, i.e. multicultural, intercultural, cross-cultural and transcultural. The term transcultural in this article derives from Welsch's understanding: transculturality tries to transcend the classical notion of cultures (and other related terms), which presupposed culture as a holistic entity, as an island, isolated from one another with a border. Cultures became, following Herder's notion, to represent a way of life of a certain ethnic group, and consequently something an ethnic group *owns*. Transculturation thus transcends the juxtaposing of cultures and stresses the interaction between different societies and their "cultural" exchange. Furthermore, transculturality also points to the internal complexities. However, even more appropriate is the term transculturaltion, as Marija Jurić Pahor stresses, as it addresses also the process and continuity, while transculturation points to the occurrence of the phenomena. See Marija Jurić Pahor, "Transkulturacija in kulturna hibridnost: dva ključna pojma postkolonialnih študijev kot izziv za proučevanje nacionalnih in etničnih identitet [Transculturation and Cultural Hybridity: Two Key Notions of Postcolonial Studies as a Challenge for the Study of National and Ethnic Identities]," *Razprave in gradivo: Revija za narodnostna vprašanja* 69 [Treatises and Documents, Journal of Ethnic Studies 69] (December 2012): 36–65.

Table 1: Transculturality in Slovenian Istria

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No answer	Total
Living near the border has been changing the culture of the inhabitants for centuries.	3.5	5.5	15.8	31.3	42.6	1.4	100
We are still tied to the Slovenian national milieu, even though we are watching (and following) the mass media from different cultural milieus.	1.8	4.6	26.7	33.2	30.7	3.1	100
People living near the Italian border have some characteristics that they adopted from the Italians.	4.9	6.4	26.0	35.8	27.0	0.0	100
The Slovenians from Slovenian Istria are, according to their lifestyle and mentality, more similar to Italians than to Slovenians from the central Slovenia.	8.4	6.6	31.3	30.4	23.3	0.0	100
My childhood and youth would have been very different without Italian TV programmes.	26.8	11.3	17.5	19.1	25.4	0.0	100

Transculturality is rather recognized in Slovenian Istria. The majority of the informants recognize the transcultural aspects of the region; they think that the inhabitants of the area are more transcultural compared to their compatriots from the central Slovenia; are, regarding their lifestyle and mentality, more similar to their "neighbours" across the border than to other Slovenians, etc. However, they do not feel that the Italian TV programmes played an important role. But, as further findings suggest, there was a statistically significant difference between younger and older generations. The Italian TV programmes played a far more (statistically significant) important role with the younger generations, as they were the ones who grew up with the Italian media contents, when Italian TV programmes became widely accessible also in Slovenian Istria. From the questionnaire answers it could be concluded that the middle and younger generations were "socialized" with Italian television and Italian popular culture, which was "confirmed" in the interviews. Many younger generations' informants thus stated they feel the Italian popular culture close to them, in some aspects more than Slovenian popular culture.

However, regardless of recognizing the transcultural aspects lived in Slovenian Istria, respondents still think we are primarily tied to "our" nation-state, Slovenia – the national context is still very important.

National Self-Identification

Furthermore, as presented above, informants recognize the practices of cultural hybridization, that is to say the intermixture of everyday practices that are supposed to belong to different national entities. Although informants recognize this, and some even stated they especially like it as well as they like living in the border area:

I like it, well, there are good and bad things, but I like the fact that we are bordering Italy, that we are open, that we … that we have also these Italian things. I think that my childhood would have been boring if we hadn't had Italy near us.
(Interviewee 18, f, 25 years)

However, this was not reflected in their self-identifications. When asked about their identification – some interviewees understood from the context that the topic included also national identifications – they answered differently, prevailingly (also) in national terms.[26] Although they were free to express themselves, we can presume that they are used to express themselves in a certain way, for example form different bureaucratic forms, population censuses and similar. However, in comparison to the survey, in the interviews they were a little more "free" to self-identify themselves and also to explain their choice(s).

Their answers could roughly be categorized in three groups. The first group could be identified as "monolithically Slovenian" – usually also with the reference to the Slovenian nation-state:

I am Slovenian. I am born in Slovenia and all.
(Interviewee 6, f, 36 years)

The second group classifies those who besides from stating their Slovenian identification, also stressed their regional / local identifications.[27] In other words, they combined regional and Slovenian affiliations:

I am an Istrian woman. And a conscious Slovenian.
(Interviewee 10, f, 50 years old)

The third group comprises the informants who wanted to stress also their hybridity:

Hehe. I am Slovenian. A contaminated Slovenian.
Contaminated with what?
With Croatianess and Italian-… let's say contaminated by the neighbours. With much pleasure. Of course I can't deny my blood, DNA, but I do not give meaning to that …
(Interviewee 8, f, 63 years)

This interviewee, even though she is happy to be "contaminated," culturally hybrid, still self-defines with the language of primordial /

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[26]   Informant no. 8 also stressed her gender, besides nationality (and "transculutral contamination") as an important part of her identification.

[27]   However, even these informants always stated their national affiliation. There was just one informant who would not define himself in national terms: "Istrian, Istrian, what else … neither Slovenian, neither Italian, nor Croatian" (Interviewee 15, m, 53 years).

essentialistic view of nationalism, as she "can't deny her blood." Once again, the prevalence of national identifications is in accordance with Billig's observations: our homelands are "flagged" daily and we are daily reminded of our national identity. It could be said that national(istic) framework is very important: even though some interviewees stressed their local or transcultural self-identification, it was still important to them to stress also their national affiliation.

Furthermore, little, banal, everyday practices which are performed by individuals, also sustain the idea of nationality and support "Slovenianness." These everyday practices are exhibited with the purpose of stressing their belonging to the national entity. Some would prefer to buy products and farmers' crops from Slovenians and care about them being produced in Slovenia, they would prefer to buy groceries in supermarkets owned by a Slovenian merchant, some would go on vacation only somewhere in Slovenia (as opposed to going to Croatia and elsewhere, as was usual at the times of Yugoslavia), etc. Informants themselves pointed out that these practices are to explicitly state their Slovenianness. However, regardless of which way informants choose to sustain and express their patriotic concerns – it must be stressed that not all informants pointed out such examples and would also engage in "unpatriotic practices" (buying groceries in Italy) – there is one domain where their nationalistic flags were flagged with great enthusiasm – at least for the big majority – sport. No matter how interested or uninterested they are / were in sports, for how many foreign sportsmen and sportswomen (did) they cheer, cheering for national sportsmen and sportswomen inspires / inspired them with a special pride – a pride that is linked to the conception of "our" compatriots, which is rooted in the belief the (Slovenian) nation is an extended family. This reflects the primordial / essentialistic understanding of nationalism.[28] As Edensor[29] points out, sport is the most media-mediated aspect of national life.

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[28]   John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith, "Introduction," in *Ethnicity*, ed. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 3; Anthony D. Smith*, The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995 [1986]), 12.
[29]   Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford and New York: Berg), 2002.

Furthermore, this is also in accordance with Billig's[30] findings: sport represents the domain through which individuals are interpellated as members of a nation with the use of specific deixis.

Discussion

Informants were asked about different cultural practices they engage in either in the telephone survey or in the life-stories interviews. The results show that informants do engage in transcultural practices – the ones that could be understood in commonsensical terms of crossing the borders of "national cultures." These range from language mixing to Italian media consumption, from eating what is understood as Italian cuisine to living the Italian way of life (which is commonsensically referred to as enjoying life and good food, openness, Italian humour, etc.).

From the results of the quantitative study, it can be observed that informants engage in transcultural practices at the level of language. There are 30.7 % of respondents who often and 49 % who sometimes use Italian words when speaking in Slovenian. Regarding the language aspect, respondents are rather transcultural and also "tolerate" language intermixtures in private and public (although to a lesser extent in a public setting).

The aspect of language mixing is very important, especially because "national languages" are thought to be – in many cases – the pillars of "national cultures" and, consequently, have to be nourished and preserved. They are seen as distinct entities, even though, as Billig[31] points out, different languages and speeches became to be understood as separate from one another precisely with nationalism. Before that people spoke differently, but it did not have the same meaning it has today; mainly it meant that people just did not understand one another. "National languages," even though they are a product of modern national processes, and are, of course, social constructs, are supposed to remain intact and thus mixing "national languages" is seen as immoral and

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30 Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, 120.
31 Ibid.

treacherous.[32] This would mean that informants engage in transcultural practises, namely, language hybridisation, but more than that, they are, to some extent, opposing the dominant hegemonic view of pure national languages and cultures, as Andrej E. Skubic suggests that "the resistance to the school grammar is part of the resistance to the dominant culture."[33] Unfortunately, the questions regarding lifestyles, eating habits, humour and similar were not – as it is also quite difficult to get this kind of information from quantitative research – asked in the telephone survey, but these themes came up in some life-stories interviews. However, the informants believe that their lifestyles, including eating habits, "life perspectives" (as enjoying life to the fullest, enjoying good food, leisure, etc.), humour and other things are commonly understood to be part of the "Italian culture." In their eyes, this makes them more similar to Italians than to Slovenians from the central part of the state.

Well, it surely influences [cultural practices crossing the national border, author's note]. It can't be any other way, right. We are people, we are not stones. But I can't say that now I became an Italian. (…)
Would you then rather say that your habits are more similar to Slovenians from other parts of Slovenia?
No, it's not that. (…) It is hard to generalise like that. Here, we are more open, in comparison to other parts of Slovenia and that makes us more similar to Italians, right. (…). We are mentally open, right. I don't know, I would say that we treat ourselves and that we, I don't know, like to eat good food. But everybody does that, right. It's just that "good food" for me is something completely different than for someone from Upper Carniola [a region in Slovenia, author's note], right.
(Interviewee 2, m, 30 years)

Cuisine, music, fashion and this openness, connecting with others, but also this body language, when we speak, right. We are like Italians, we show it all with our hands [when we speak, author's note]. (…) This is the part that makes us somehow (…) a little different [from the Slovenians from other

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[32]   Maruša Pušnik, *Popularizacija nacije: Komuniciranje, nacionalizem in proizvodnja mej* [Popularising the Nation: Communication, Nationalism and Producing Borders] (Ljubljana: Fakulteta za družbene vede, Založba FDV), 2011.
[33]   Andrej E. Skubic, *Obrazi jezika* [Faces of a Language] (Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2005), 209.

parts of Slovenia, author's note], right. (…) They [the Italians, author's note] have a humour, which is close to ours, right. Now, in Ljubljana [the capital of Slovenia, author's note], they will not understand that. That is why Italian television is close to us, this openness, because they are not restrained. They say it. While in Slovenia, we are as (…) sometimes I feel we are watching a theatre performance.

(Interviewee 9, f, 48 years)

Many interviewees pointed out they feel at home with Italian culture and enjoy it.[34] In general, practices bound to the Slovenian context, had a nationalistic overtone, while the transcultural ones, mixing what informants commonsensically believe to be Italian (popular) culture were in the domain of the pleasure – especially watching television –, with the exception of sports, of course. Informants chose the "Slovenian" practices, as they were congruent with their patriotic concerns as nationalism favours the national economy, while Italian transcultural influences are in the domain of pleasure. Even the ones, previously identified in the field of Slovenianess, e.g. shopping (supporting Slovenian economy), was then explained as pleasure: because buying Italian products in Italy meant greater quality and originality, consequently increasing their pleasure in experiencing authenticity. However, even though people identify within Italianness and it is, to some extent, a point of reference to differentiate from "other Slovenians," it still seems sacrilegious not to define oneself in nationalistic terms.

Conclusion

On the one hand, informants recognise the transculturality of the area and (at least some of them) engage in different transcultural practices. They also like Italian (media) culture, where they feel at home. Living in the "liminal space" between two (and more) "national" cultures is their everyday, their home. However, even though they prefer Italian media culture and feel closer to the commonsensical Italian "openness,"

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[34] Anyway, the mentioned cases are just to point to the prevailing atmosphere among the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria (and without focusing on other transcultural practices as Englishness in the last years and Yugoslavianness even before that) and are not an indicative representation of the actual population.

etc. than to Slovenian media culture and other aspect of Slovenian "national culture," they live in the Slovenian Istria and are (predominately) Slovenian citizens. Therefore, on the other hand, the Slovenian national context is their point of reference, especially regarding their self-identification and affiliation, which is understood in essentialistic terms as quasi-kinship, extended family metaphor. This is seen especially in the field of sport's affiliations, but also others, e.g. helping the Slovenian economy by buying Slovenian products sold by Slovenian merchants, going on vacation in Slovenia and, thus, promoting Slovenian tourism, etc.

Anyway, it still must be stressed that there were some interviewees who refused to identify in national terms (interviewee 15, m, 53 years and interviewee 7, f, 33 years). Others pointed to the social construction of national cultures (interviewee 7, f, 33 years, interviewee 17, f, 67 years and interviewee 26, m, 17 years) and to the role of the education system in the socialization into the "national" culture and question its construction (interviewee 3, m, 23 years and interviewee 23, 33 years). Nevertheless, the omnipresence of nationalism still makes the system of nation-states accepted worldwide and we rarely question it: we are trained to define ourselves in national terms. It would seem that there are a lot of initiatives to diminish the meaning of borders and to connect people, especially in Europe, and even more in the Schengen Area, which facilitates the exchange of goods and people. However, it is also evident that national borders persist in our heads and the majority "cannot deny their blood," thus, reproducing and reinforcing the essentialistic view of nationalism.

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