Local Cultural Heritage Collections from the Slovenian-Italian Border Region

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Abstract This paper discusses the development of a network of owners and guardians of local CH collections as well as professionals from different fields in the Slovenian-Italian border region that was implemented in the framework of the project ZBORZBIRK. Cultural heritage in the Collections between the Alps and the Karst. The paper highlights the importance of local CH and collecting for local communities, the general public and experts, and shows that CH has become a medium for the establishment of a local community.

Summary 1 Introduction. – 2 Methodological, Historical and Conceptual Premises. – 3 The ZBORZBIRK Project. – 4 Discussions. – 5 Conclusions.

Keywords Guardians. Local CH. Local communities. Slovenia.

1 Introduction

The northern Slovenian-Italian border region between the Alps and the Karst – i.e. the north-eastern mountain part of the province of Udine in Italy
and the northern part of the Goriška region in Slovenia – is a remote area, which is, in comparison with the regional urban and tourist centres, underdeveloped in terms of economy. Due to the remoteness of the area and a consecutive delay in socio-economic structural changes on both sides of the border, some elements of past material culture remained well preserved in situ. That resulted in vigorous collecting practices and numerous

1 The project included the following areas of the province of Udine: the Canale valley, the Resia valley, the Torre valleys, the Cornappo valleys, and the Natisone valleys. For better readability, all toponyms from the Italian part are kept in the official, Italian form, although they also exist in Slovenian (and in some areas also in Friulian and German). On the other hand, the toponyms from the Slovenian part are kept in Slovenian.

2 The project included the Brda, the Kobarid and the Kanal area in the Goriška region, as well as the Upper Sava valley in the Gorenjska region.

3 For the consideration about the remoteness of the Slavia Veneta, recently named also Slavia Friulana, see Kozorog 2013.
CH collections. The presented ZBORZBIRK project Cultural heritage in the Collections between the Alps and the Karst aimed at evaluating this CH collections of the once interrelated, yet in the decades of the second half of the 20th century politically divided, and after the entrance of the Republic of Slovenia in the EU in 2004, and in particular after its entrance in the Schengen Area in 2007, supposedly re-united territory of the border region(s).

2 Methodological, Historical and Conceptual Premises

The paper is based on a participant observation, that is on an intensive involvement – as a project manager\(^4\) – in day-to-day tasks management and issues resolving, and on a post-project consideration of the project's results, its impact and, in particular, different ways of dealing with CH collections, heritage practices and heritage uses of different actors involved – from project partners (experts, representatives of the Slovenian minority in Italy, local communities) to main stakeholders (collectors).

Till the beginning of the 19th century the border region in question was dived among the Republic of Venice and the Inner Austria of the Habsburg Monarchy. Between 1797 and 1866 it was joined under the Austrian Empire. In 1866 the Slavia Veneta was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy, whereas the rest remained under the Austrian Empire. The transition of the Slavia Veneta under the Kingdom of Italy was followed by a period of forced assimilation of the Slovenian minority, which reached its peak during the Fascist period, when the whole pertinent region came under the Italian rule. After the end of the WWII the Slavia Veneta and the Canale valley were immediately re-annexed to Italy, whereas the Goriška region was under Anglo-American administration till the Paris Peace Treaty of 1947, when it was annexed to Yugoslavia. The Slovenians living in the province of Udine – in contrast to the Slovenians in the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia\(^5\) – were not legally recognized as a linguistic minority until

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\(^4\) The initial idea, the overall aim and the project consortium were designed by Mojca Ravnik (Institute of the Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU) in cooperation with the colleagues at the University of Udine.

\(^5\) The first international legal source that provided Slovenians in the province of Trieste with a basic form of legal protection was the Special Statute of the London Memorandum of 1954, which laid down a number of political and social rights for the Slovenian minority in Italy, namely the right to use their language in interactions with administrative services and judicial authorities, the right to bilingual public signs and bilingual printed publications, the right to bilingualism in educational, cultural and other organizations, the right to public funding intended for these organizations, and the right to instruction in their mother tongue together with the right to preserve the existing Slovenian schools (Stranj 1992).
the adoption of the Protection Law no. 38 in 2001 (Vidau 2013, 36, 46).

It was in the 19th century, the period of European movements for the establishment of modern nations and nation states, that the Slovenian and Italian national identity in the modern linguistic, social and political sense began to develop. Nationalism and nation-building had been since then an important process, ideology and/or meta-narrative to bind populations to a shifting sense of territorial identity and to legitimize state formation (Graham et al. 2000, 12). Within the context of 19th century nationalisms also a heritage discourse emerged in association with national identity by providing a physical representation and reality to the ‘ephemeral and slippery concept of identity’ (Lowenthal 1985, 214). Grand narratives of nations were perpetuated in the “authorized heritage discourse” (Smith 2010) that had stressed

the significance of material culture in playing a vital representational role in defining national identity. (2010, 48)

But beside national identifications, heritage can be also employed as a physical representation of other meanings, “of those things from the past that speak to a sense of place, a sense of self, of belonging and community” (Smith 2010, 30).

The greatest attention of the ZBORZBIRK project was dedicated to the material heritage – that is the evaluation of tangible CH collections and their objects by identification, documentation, renewal and presentation to the public. In this paper, I would like to focus a bit more on the procedural and performative aspects of heritage, that is on the processes of ‘heritage making’, as it was stated by Laurejane Smith that

‘heritage’ is not a ‘thing’, it is not a ‘site’, building or other material object. [...] Rather, heritage is what goes on at these sites. [... It] is a cultural process that engages with acts of remembering that work to create ways to understand and engage with the present. (Smith 2010, 44)

Although the project was primarily dedicated to the material heritage – in this article I focus on the processes of heritage making in and around the project, their ground and effects.

6 “Regulations for the Protection of the Slovene speaking Minority of the region Friuli-Venezia Giulia” (Law no. 38 of February 14 2001).

7 Nationalism might be connected with ethnicity, which is, following Barth (1969), comprehended relationally; it means that the existence of the ethnic group and its cultural distinctiveness (ex. language, work etc.) has to be affirmed socially and ideologically through the general recognition among its members and outsiders. Ethnicity enables ‘appropriation of a shared history’ and is created and forced through social and political processes (Eriksen 2001, 263-8).
3 The ZBORZBIRK Project

The applied ZBORZBIRK Project – *Cultural Heritage in the Collections between the Alps and the Karst* was designed on the basis of the long-term ethnographic research of the researchers of the Institute of the Slovenian Ethnology ZRC SAZU and the University of Udine. To the consortium joined the newly-established Institute for Slovenian Culture in San Pietro al Natisone, two museums (the Goriška Museum in Kromberk – Nova Gorica and the Upper Sava valley Museum in Jesenice) and six local communities (the Italian municipalities of Lusevera, Pulfero and Taipana, and the Slovenian municipalities of Brda, Kanal ob Soči and Kobarid). The project was approved and implemented within the *Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme Slovenia–Italy 2007-2013* between 1 October 2012 and 31 March 2015 and co-financed by the ERDF and national funds from the Republics of Slovenia and Italy. It aimed to evaluate – i.e. identify, register, digitalize, contextualize, arrange, present and promote in different media – local CH collections in the northern Slovenian–Italian border region, in the area between the Canale valley and the Upper Sava valley in the north, the region of Brda in the south, the Soča valley in the east, and the Torre valley in the west.

The project involved thirty-four CH collections; fifteen from the Slovenian side of the border and nineteen from the Italian side. Fifteen collections were compiled in the 1970s and 1980s, sixteen in the 1990s and 2000s, and three collections were built up during the project. Most of these collections (twenty-one) are in private hands; eighteen were assembled through collecting, and three of them belonged to a family and were acquired by bequest. Besides private ownership, some of the collections belong to associations (eight), local communities (four), and even to a museum branch. Only four collections are regularly on view to the public, six of them are inaccessible, while the rest can be viewed by prior arrangement with the owner or the guardian of the collection. The collections differ according to typology and content. Typologically, two collections contain holy cards, one collection consists of postcards, and the remaining collections include different material objects. Concerning the content, many collections focus on local crafts (carpentry, blacksmithing, sharpening of knives, scissors and tools), certain types of objects (clothing, carnival characters, carvings) or individual objects within one type of objects (rakes, irons). Eight collections share the thematic content of objects from the WWI (Ravnik 2012; Ledinek Lozej 2014). The collectors and/or managers which joined the project were identified on the basis of the registers and documentation of the regional museums, the Slovenian Ethnological Association, and the project partners. Some of the invited collectors refused to participate at the project due to various reasons, the others joined in the course of initial activities.

The central activity of the project was the creation of an inventory of

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…thirty-four local CH collections. Specific collection and material characteristics, differences in the interests of collectors and differences in the professional competences of registrars influenced physical and informational scopes of the registration process. For the purpose of the inventory, a metadata scheme and an application for entering the data of the inventoried objects were established, based on past experiences in museology, collections management standards and recommendations, former and existing museum applications, open source platforms and frameworks and particularly on information projects in the field of ethnology that had dealt with similar circumstances and encountered similar problems. One of the main challenges of the project was to define a metadata scheme and a registration procedure that would be sufficiently flexible not to discourage the owners and the registrars from a thorough and comprehensive registration of objects (Ledinek Lozej, Peče 2014). A unified repository aggregating metadata of material objects (items) from the collections as well as digital photographs and scans of images and textual objects was established. In total, there are 5355 items and 9334 digital objects (digital photographs or scans) in the repository at the moment. The other goal in creating a metadata scheme was to maximize interoperability, which would facilitate a possible unification of metadata of individual collections with potential applications for an inventory of museum objects (Ledinek Lozej, Peče 2014; Ledinek Lozej, Peče, Ivančič Kutin 2015). The repository is intended for researchers, experts and students from the fields of ethnology, cultural anthropology, history, linguistics, and museology as well as

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8 The metadata scheme contained the following data elements about the collections (excluding administrative and technical elements): name, location (geographical longitude and latitude, country, place, address), collection’s accessibility for the public, founder, owner and manager of the collection, museum institution where the collection is registered, collection description and data of those involved in the registration process (administrator, registrar, photographer, language editor, editor and photograph editor). In the web application, every collection was assigned a unique identification number and a label that collection items were automatically given. Alongside the already mentioned typological element, other elements were defined for collection items: standard name in the Slovenian and the Italian language (and possibly in the Friulian and German languages, in case of any etymological connection), a local or dialectal name of the object, state of preservation, completeness, acquisition, materials and production technique, production date, authorship, measurements, object description, object use, object history, sources, inscriptions, and remarks. Later, an element set was also added. In addition to certain technical or internal metadata, administration elements also included a registration date, a date of registration change, identification number or label, former or other labels, and the registrar. For the purpose of categorization and taxonomy, an ethnological decimal controlled vocabulary was used. In accordance with the demands of the Cross-Border Cooperation Operational Programme Slovenia–Italy 2007-2013, a collection of elements was anticipated to be bilingual, i.e. in the Slovenian and the Italian language (Ledinek Lozej, Peče 2014; Ledinek Lozej, Peče, Ivančič Kutin 2015).

9 This work is still in progress as some collectors or registrars are still adding data into the repository.
for the general public. It can be accessed through a search engine placed on the website of the project.¹⁰

Parallel to the registration of the objects, extensive fieldwork was conducted to record stories around the collections and the objects. The primary informants were collection owners, who knew their collections and collection items best. Information about collections owned by local communities or other legal entities was provided by people who donated their objects to museum collections or took an active part in the establishment of the collection (secondary informants). Most of the attention was paid to the beginnings of collecting (reasons, incentives, period, role models/colleagues, etc.) and to the personal selection of the most favourite, most valuable or most interesting items and the reasons for this choice. Together with the intensive fieldwork a visual contextualization of collections was performed by making recordings of the collectors and by digitalizing archival audio-visual material.¹¹

In addition to the registration and contextualization of the collections, i.e. the museological and research part of the project, local communities also renovated five buildings that housed the collections, arranged equipment for the exhibitions, presented twelve collections to the public and established eleven information points.

Alongside these information points, several other ways of dissemination of information were employed. In addition to the mandatory dissemination tools – project website,¹² signposts, roll-ups, posters – all the collections were also presented in the guidebook Kulturna dediščina med Alpami in Krasom. L’eredità culturale fra Alpi e Carso.¹³ Most of the collections were also presented in their own leaflets (27 different leaflets for a total circulation of 36,300 copies) and were featured in the exhibition catalogue Etnologija, zbirke in prva vojna (Ethnology, Collections and WWI) (Miklavčič-Brezigar 2015). In addition, three CDs were published: Fiabe resiane. Rezijanske pravljice (Resia Fairy Tales) (Dapit, Kropej 2014), Te so peli v Prosnidu. Queste erano cantate a Prossenicco (These were Sung in Prossenicco) (Ivančič Kutin 2014), and Valli del Natisone. Antichi carnevali senza tempo. Nediške doline. Stari karnevali in brezčasni obredi (Natisone valley. Old Carnivals and Timeless Rituals) (Pignat 2015). Two major events were organised for the general public and experts, namely a workshop for collectors Zbirke povezujejo. Le collezioni uniscono (Collections Unite) in the villages of Kanal ob Soči and Kambreško (18 May 2013) and an in-

¹¹ Some of the material can be accessed on the following webpage: http://zborzbirk.zrc-sazu.si/it-it/raccontieimmagini.aspx (ZBORZBIRK 2016a).
4 Discussions

The ZBORZBIRK Project is one of the first projects in the Italian–Slovenian cross-border region which links non-institutional collections and collectors with experts. In the framework of the project we had the opportunity to follow and overcome negotiations between two (if not even more) authorised heritage discourses, to name but a few, the heritage discourses of the Slovenian and Italian majority, those of (Slovenian) minority in Italy, as well as heritage discourses of different experts, and a bulk of less-authorised or even subversive heritage discourses, that employed identifications linked to a sense of a place, (local) community, and self.

And which were the meanings that the project – authorised from the EU, from national and regional governments as well as from different expert institutions included in the project – aimed to transmit and reinforce? It highlighted the multiple importance of local CH collections and, above all, of collecting practices for local communities, the general public, and experts from the fields of museology, ethnology, cultural anthropology, digital humanities, informatics, etc.

Firstly, the preserved objects in the collections, the stories about the collections and the objects, and local narrative folklore bear witness to the (semi-)past culture and the ways of life in the area, thus providing insight into economic activities, dwelling culture, nutrition habits, handcraft skills, emigration and seasonality, social relationships, calendar customs and customs and traditions.

14 The papers presented at the conference were published in the conference proceedings Le collezioni uniscono. Collezioni etnologiche, tradizione orale e turismo culturale fra le Alpi e il Carso. Zbirke povezujejo. Etnološke zbirke, ustno izročilo in kulturni turizem med Alpami in Krasom (Ethnological Collections, Oral Tradition and Cultural Tourism) in Udine (29 May 2014). There were over twenty smaller events on the occasion of the opening of the renovated premises, collections exhibitions and information points, and other public presentations of the collections and the collectors (Ledinek Lozej, Ravnik 2016).

15 Experts’ heritage discourses – and the project itself is not excepted from it – are authorised par excellence, as different experts often set the agendas and provide epistemological frameworks that define debates about the meaning and the nature of the past and its heritage. “The ability to possess, control and give meaning to the past and/or heritage sites is a re-occurring and reinforcing statement of disciplinary authority and identity” (Smith 2010, 50).
of a life cycle, family history and local community history, local dialect, etc. Furthermore, the materiality of objects and collections can be employed by private collectors as a physical representation of many identifications, ranging from a sense of self (ex. some personal collections acquired by bequest or a collection of irons from all over the world) to a sense of place and local community (ex. collections of local crafts, agricultural utensils, etc.). We might suppose that collecting was used as a means of communicating cultural difference (Eriksen 2001, 262), of expressing either local, ethnic or – at a larger scale on the Italian side of the border, where public uttering of the Slovenian identity was suppressed by the Italian authorities – also Slovenian national identity. The assimilation process of the Slovenian speaking inhabitants,\textsuperscript{16} forced by the shrinking of media for ethnic socialization\textsuperscript{17} and partially also by emigration,\textsuperscript{18} started with the annex of the Slavia Veneta to the Kingdom of Italy in 1866 and had its peak during the Fascist period. The Slovenian minority in the province of Udine was recognized only in 2001 with the Protection Law no. 38.\textsuperscript{19} The measures resulted in assimilation or in fear or at least in inconvenience of expressing Slovenian national or ethnic identity in public. Under-communication of the national/ethnic identity in public context by means of language was by some of them compensated by collecting practices. Collecting was – in comparison to public use of Slovenian language – not designated or sensed as a contentious practice, but yet enabled them to remember everyday life, rituals and traditions from the past,\textsuperscript{20} and, by doing that, to communicate cultural differences.

But collecting was not a suitable way to express cultural difference only for those who were frightened of expressing Slovenian identity because of the oppressions of the Italian authorities, but also for those who were feeling uncomfortable because they didn’t master the standard Slovenian, or even for those who didn’t master neither vernacular nor standard Slo-

\textsuperscript{16} Like other minorities in the formation’s period of modern States and the classic nationalisms, also the Slovenians in Italy were seen as a potential factor of conflict (Bufon 2016, 18-19).

\textsuperscript{17} For more see also Brezigar 2016; Jagodic 2016; Jagodíc, Kaučič-Baša, Dapit 2016.


\textsuperscript{19} Relevant provisions for the Slovenian-speaking population of the province of Udine were actually introduced in 1999 with the Law no. 482, and followed by the “Regulations for the Protection of the Slovene speaking Minority of the Region Friuli-Venezia Giulia” (Law no. 38 of February 14 2001). For further reading about the protection measures and the impact of further legal modifications, such as the Regional Law no. 26 of 2007, see Vidau 2013, 2016.

\textsuperscript{20} References to past life, rituals and traditions, that is historical continuity of the group, are usually important elements of an ethnic long period of time (Eriksen 2001, 267).
Due to the assimilation and stigmatization processes, and the lack of any form of collective minority and linguistic rights from 1866 until 1999, the majority of the Slovenian-speaking population in the province of Udine speaks vernacular (“nediško”, “rozajanski”), that is a local Slovenian dialect, and is not familiar with standard Slovenian (Vidau 2013, 37).

The situation is even more complex, because a part of the vernacular speakers doesn’t recognise their mother tongue as a Slovenian dialect, but as “a local Slavic language”, a Natisone (“nediško”) or a Resian (“rozajanski”) language. These complexity of identifications shows that (vernacular) Slovenian speaking inhabitants of the province of Udine have been subjected to the different authorised discourses (at least that one of the Italian and Slovenian national ideology), which influenced their self-recognition and identification.

Authorised heritage discourses, linked with the development of 19th century nationalisms, are challenged (Smith 2010, 5,17) as different actors “discover” their cultural uniqueness as a resource and exploit it for political purposes. The multiplicity of interpretations is not just a counter-reaction to globalization, but a result of intensified contact between groups because of technological and cultural changes following modernisation (Eriksen 2001, 309).

Collecting as a selective, active and longitudinal act of acquisition, possession and disposition of an interrelated set of different objects that contributed to and derived an extraordinary meaning from the entity (Belk

21 Discordance between mastering the language and national identification is reported also by Zuljan Kumar (forthcoming), as she identifies inhabitants who master vernacular but do not feel part of the Slovenian community, and others, on the other hand, who have a strong sense of belonging to the Slovenian community and no knowledge of the Slovenian language.

22 The reason of the unfamiliarity with standard Slovenian – invented by the mass media (Anderson 1991) and the State educational system (Eriksen 2001, 278) – lies in the lack of education, media and social practices in standard Slovenian. After WWII, in the Canale valley standard Slovenian language was only taught by priests, and later at the courses of the Planika Association. It has only recently been introduced in elementary schools and occasionally in secondary schools (Gliha Komac 2009). The Slavia Veneta region did not have schools until 1984, when a private bilingual kindergarten and, two years later, the first class of a primary school opened in San Pietro al Natisone. The Bilingual School Centre became a state school only after the adoption of the Law for the protection of the Slovenian minority in 2001 (Law no. 38 2001). In 2007, a secondary school also opened (http://www.icbilingue.gov.it/scoole-dellinfanzia/viale-azzida-9). There is no education in standard Slovenian in the Resia valley. For further information about education in Slovenian see Bogatec 2016. For further information on the role of CH in social communication among participants of the Slovenian minority in Italy see Ravnik 2017.

23 See for example Špehonja 2012.

24 For more complex, mixed and hybrid multidimensional identities among Slovenians in Italy see Jagodic 2016, 43.
et al. 1991) thus became a practice of expressing uncontested personal and/or communal – local, regional or national – identifications.\(^{25}\) The imaginative link that unites the collected material may be purely personal or may engage the wider world (Pearce 1995, 27), in the \textit{ZBORZBIRK} case it ranged from very personal collections of irons and holy cards, found remnants of the WWI, inherited carpentry and blacksmith workshop, to collections of a great variety of rakes, manufactured by the local craftsmen, to the larger and more systematic collections of the local crafts, clothing or carnival characters. As it was demonstrated by Susan Pearce,

\begin{quote}
the individual [...] stands at the crux of past and present and creates his collection in terms of the tensions between these two and of his individual poetic response. (Pearce 1995, 33-4)
\end{quote}

Material objects of heritage might have different meanings and interpretations for diverse actors.\(^{26}\) The majority of collections included in the \textit{ZBORZBIRK} project were mostly created as a more or less long term collecting practice which enabled expression and communication of personal or cultural difference with references to self and/or to place and community. Only recently and occasionally, at a larger scale, in the framework of the “authorised heritage discourse ” (Smith 2010) by different (supra) national and regional subjects, among others also that one of the \textit{European Programme of Cross-border Cooperation}, they were employed for larger aims of the European Territorial Cooperation. But, as it was delineated above, it was designed bottom-up as far as possible, as it involved, beside project partners, also collectors, and enabled them to choose their objects to be registered, stories to be told, experiences to be shared, and connections to be established. It give them the opportunity to participate – using the words of Laurejane Smith – in “heritage work”, in “a process of engagement, an act of communication and act of making in and for the present” (1, 3) – under the umbrella of the cross-border cooperation and European integration.

\(^{25}\) “The notion of the special object set we call a collection is bound up with ideas – not about intention and purpose of the objects themselves as such, since we social animals do everything with intention of one sort of another – but about the deliberate intention to create a group of material perceived by its possessors to be lifted out of common purposes of daily life and to be appropriate to carry a significant investment of thought and feeling, and so also of time, trouble and resource” (Pearce 1995, 23). For passing of the collections from the profane – the secular world of mundane, ordinary commodity – to the sacred, thereby acquiring the character of something extraordinary, special and capable of generating reverence, see Belk et al. (1988).

\(^{26}\) And consecutively cause dissonance. For the argument on “dissonant heritage” see Ashworth, Tunbridge 1996.
5 Conclusions

The collaborative approach of the ZBORZBIRK Project with its use of information and communication technologies and its network of experts from different fields (museology, ethnology, cultural anthropology, linguistics, folklore, digital humanities, archival sciences, etc.), representative of local communities and collectors, might be considered a pilot action that evaluated CH collections of the cross-border region and highlighted the multiple importance of collections and collecting practices for uncontested expression and communication of cultural difference in the framework of different more or less authorised heritage discourses.

A post-project view from afar seems to prove the statement of Thomas Hyland Eriksen “that whereas cultural differences in many regards become less apparent because of increased contact and the general processes of modernisation, ethnic identity and self-consciousness become increasingly important. The more similar people become, it seems, the more they are concerned with remaining distinctive” (Eriksen 2001, 262).

We are looking forward to the possible follow-up projects that might additionally challenge the dominant discourses and reinforce and deepen the community participation in heritage management, interpretation and conservation work, for example in different new-emerging forms, like the ecomuseums or the “heritage communities”, promoted by the FARO Convention (2005).27

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27 Compare the examples of the organisation of local communities in heritage communities that were realised in Marseilles and Venice (D’Alessandro 2015; Di Mauro 2015). For more about HC see Giampieretti 2015.

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