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# Mediterranean in Istria and Istria in the Mediterranean (Interpretation and presentation of the Istrian Mediterranean)

*Although changing, in spite of everything  
Mediterranean seems eternal to us  
(Matvejević 2006:30)*

*Istria is often described as a Mediterranean country, or region. This paper raises the question of when such comparisons are justified, and when they are not and in which areas is the Mediterranean presented in Istria. The fields of nutrition and culinary arts, education, art and architecture and, particularly, tourism are analyzed. This paper discusses the veracity of the presentation and interpretation of the Istrian Mediterranean in the context of it being a recognizable tourist destination.*

Keywords: Istrian Mediterranean , Mediterranean culture, Istrian diet

## Introduction

The paper is based on the definition, interpretation and presentation of the Mediterranean in Istria. The nutritional, artistic, educational and tourist aspects and the traditional elements of Mediterranean culture that can be found within the Croatian part of Istria will be analyzed here.

Why have I chosen these four elements? Nutrition was chosen primarily because it is a symbol and a link to the basic definitions of the Mediterranean, like the olive, which has been present in the Istrian landscape since Antiquity, but also because the food and eating habits have until recently been conditioned on the climate and soil qualities of their region. The artistic aspects will be analyzed through stone as the traditional Mediterranean architectural and artistic material, and therefore through the form of the beauty of the architecture and landscape, but also through sculpture as a defined expressive art form. The educational components will be analyzed because the university course of Mediterra-

nean agriculture was established in Poreč – a traditionally primarily agricultural, and only after this a tourist city.

Ultimately, with the notion of the Mediterranean as a starting point of a diachronic section of the Istrian tradition, the current and the interpretation of the Mediterranean in the presentation of Istria as a distinctive tourist destination will be touched on.

## Theoretical foundations

If we want to talk about the Mediterranean authenticity of Istria, we should define the concept of Mediterranean. For our purposes, it is sufficient to mention the definition by which all the countries on the perimeter of the Mediterranean Sea fall within the Mediterranean belt and the scope of the term Mediterranean. Precisely because of this fact it is difficult to talk about a single meaning of Mediterranean faced with such a long and colorful range. It is a cross-section of different cultures, religions and races and this paper will try to identify the essentials for the interpretation of Mediterranean from the Istrian perspective: what do we (Istrians) in the northernmost part of the Adriatic Sea as a part of the Mediterranean Sea believe to be typically Mediterranean and what we offer as Mediterranean.

Let's start by noting that all cultures, identities and traditions are dynamic and complex phenomena of exchange. We should strongly differentiate these three essentially different notions from the concept of originality, the source of origin. Is originality under the influence of culture, identity and tradition truthful? Also, it is important to emphasize that all these phenomena are based on the collective memory and remembrance. Historians Maja Brkljačić and Sandra Prlenda differentiate between collective remembrance and collective memory: "Collective memory implies the active practice of designing, structuring and organizing of memories", while collective remembrance is a group of mementoes shared by a particular community. Realizing itself in the field of human interaction, collective remembrance is always a political process, and collective memory is the result of the current fragile consensus "(Brkljačić, Prlenda 2006:17).

Istrians interpret a part of their regional identity through the shared Mediterranean identity, the maritime one, as opposed to the mainland one. The important element of any personal or group identity is a sense of immutability through time and space. It is precisely this sense of immutability that is maintained by memory. According to the American historian Gillis, the assumed identity defines what is remembered. He, too, emphasizes that "memories and identities are not fixed; they are a representation or a reconstruction of reality, subjective rather than objective phenomena" (Gillis 2006:171). It can be concluded that the memories are changeable and adaptable to the needs of our new identity. This thesis would be confirmed by the Italian historian Montanari who explains that identity does not exist at the beginning, but at the end of the given path (Montanari 2011: 139), and also by the writer and novelist Matvejević: "The Mediterranean is the same at the beginning and the end of the sail, we are not" (Matvejević 2006:32).

Gillis says it is increasingly evident in this historical moment “that the identity and memory are political and social constructs and that they should be approached as such” (Gillis 2006: 173). I think that we should particularly emphasize the economic, commercial and tourist constructs that adapt identity and memory to their needs.

Matvejević builds on the previous views on recognition and memory in the context of the Mediterranean: “The cities of the Mediterranean live on memories more than others. In them, the past is often more important than the present” (Matvejević 2006:21).

However, we should note that contemporary anthropology resists a strict determination of a location as a basis for the interpretation of culture and identity, where certain places are becoming a source of anthropological conclusions. Or, as stated by anthropologists Jasna Čapo and Valentina Gulin Zrnić, “geographical zones are not just physical entities, they are rather discursively constructed frames that highlight particular social or cultural modalities... Mediterranean highlights the concepts of honor and shame, Balkan highlights the cooperative ...” (Čapo, Gulin Zrnić 2011:23). Likewise, contemporary anthropology is increasingly using terms such as blurred areas or escaping and fluid identities. Places are increasingly interpreted through the experience (as in tourism marketing), there are “different experiences of the same place” (Čapo, Gulin Zrnić 2011:26).

## Nutrition

Claudio Magris writes about the Mediterranean way in the preface to the book *Mediterranean Breviary* by Predrag Matvejević: “Culture and history are directly introduced into the substance, into stone, into the wrinkles on the faces of people, into the taste of wine and oil, into the motion of waves” (Magris 2006:9). I’ll try to interpret the Mediterranean in Istria exactly on these elements/ideas.

The Mediterranean is often associated with the diet, and the notion of the Mediterranean diet evokes the taste of wine and oil, although stone is not unimportant. It is believed that the aesthetic of taste was neglected in comparison to the other senses. Vision and hearing are at the forefront of aesthetic discourse ranking criteria. The sociologist Gronow cites Kant’s opinion that the senses of taste and smell are treated with suspicion, and that they serve as inferior sensual pleasures while vision and hearing are senses that can transfer the pure and noble aesthetic pleasures (Gronow 2000: 15). In recent years, this thesis is changing and taste is increasingly becoming the subject of scientific interest, but also a very pragmatic starting point for tourism marketing.

Thus, the Mediterranean diet has become an important component in the presentation and interpretation of the Mediterranean. In the past, one could eat certain food only in the area where it grew naturally and was cultivated, where it was original. Exceptions were always there, so in the past century rich people were finding ways to eat strawberries in winter, as well as various specialties originating from distant regions.

Today, the various types of food have become available regardless of whether they are offered in their place of origin, or in the form of mass-produced products. In the first ver-

sion, tourism makes the voyage to the country whose food is preferred possible, and in the alternative, in food stores across the “western world” one can find manufactured products, surrogates, such as canned pineapple, banana or other fruit and vegetables ripened in cold storage on the way to their destination. Ethnodifferentiating factors can be observed in the choice of food or, at least, they could have been observed until recently. Today, in the globalized world, when in the Mediterranean, therefore in Istria too, one can eat truffles in combination with cranberries, when the truffle is available in melted cheese (*formadin*) for only twenty kunas, when crabs can be eaten by members of all social classes, the sense of authenticity and originality is lost. As it was imposed on the way people dress, fashion was imposed on nutrition and, accordingly, even taste is socially projected. In the foreword of the Croatian editions of the book *Sociologizing taste* by Jukka Gronow, Čaldarović states that there is “little difference between kitsch and authenticity, now that everything is allowed and among this, the profanation of all authentic” (Čaldarović 2000:10)

Food has become a more common topic of medical debate. The importance of counting calories which will result in a slender build (or an overly thin body), but also the prevention of cardiovascular diseases, has surpassed the issues of food flavors and the discussion on gastronomic hedonism. Yet, the taste of the food is written about, as well as the culture of nutrition, and obesity, while the problem of hunger is increasingly ignored. The emergence of surplus food that imposes new norms of behavior is discussed. Being obese (overweight) is bad. Enjoying our *greasy pancetta* and excellent homemade Mediterranean olive oil (except for a small teaspoon) is bad, the permitted quantity of the high-calorie figs is limited to less than one piece daily.

Today, too, when in our rich world everything is available in the diet, we need to create an elite distinction again. Certain consumer products (or foodstuffs) have attained a high social status or value because their consumption is limited to the upper classes of society (Gronow 2000:26). So today, like clothes or music, certain types of food represent a specific lifestyle. In this one moment in history, the stylistic needs outweighed the natural food needs: “It can be asserted that the gastronomy has civilized the taste of the modern consumer by introducing new distinctions and classifications of food and drinks that have gradually lead to limitations of the human passion for food and eating” (Gronow 2000:30).

Let’s get back to the Mediterranean cuisine, very popular today, mainly because of the standpoint that it is one of the healthiest. What is the Mediterranean Cuisine? Who determines which part of the Mediterranean cuisine is the true, the original representative?

Mediterranean cuisines, therefore, in the plural, according to Montanari are not an “atavistic reality, but the result, obviously tentative, of a complex historical development. Therefore, Asia and the Americas, as well as Europe and Africa, were crucial in determining the characteristics of the food system that is routinely named “Mediterranean” which is just one of many ways of consuming food that can be found in this geographical region “(Montanari 2011:137 ).

However, let’s start from a very common assumption: *cerealia, oleum, vinumque* meaning grain, oil and wine. This “Mediterranean triad” or “Mediterranean trinity” was interpreted by the Istrian archaeologist Matijašić “as the three most important Mediterranean products, not only in antiquity, but more wide-ranging, from the beginnings of civilization almost

to the modern era” (Matijašić 2009:37). It also states that in the past the scope of luxury and wealth was measured by the possession of exotic goods from faraway lands, and that this was also true for food. It could only be afforded by the rich, the members of a higher social status, while the poor ate local food - grain, oil, wine and fish (Matijašić 2009:37). Montanari considers that the wide usage of olive oil, which was produced in antiquity but in small amounts and usually for cosmetic care, is relatively new (Montanari 2011:136).

It is a common perception that, along with fish, just these three types of food were the core, the main ingredient of almost all dishes. The most important cereals in antiquity were: wheat, rye, barley and oats. Millet, buckwheat and rice are of Asian origin, and corn came from America in 1492 (Matijašić 2009: 40). In antiquity the earliest mention of grain in Istria was in the sixth century. (Matijašić 2009: 40 - 45).

The wine grapes thrive in cooler climates so they are not associated solely with the Mediterranean, “though the civilization of wine is part of the of classical Dionysian Mediterranean culture “ (Matijašić 2009:45). It is assumed that the indigenous Illyrian tribe Histri already learned from the Greek sailors how to grow grapes and produce wine, but it was the Romans who evolved viticulture and enology as the most important branch of the economy at the local level, as well as in terms of export (Matijašić 2009:46). Today in Istria the culture of growing grapevines is developed as is the production of wine and the culture of drinking wine. Even the Istria County prefect Ivan Jakovčić is known for his sommelier education.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps this is the reason why *Vinistra* is organized in Istria, in Poreč, an event focused primarily on wine, where wine from various manufacturers is evaluated as well as oil, honey, cheese and ham. You will find a large number of wine routes where you can taste the original wines of local winemakers and viticulturists in any better tourist brochure that presents Istria.

When it comes to symbols of Mediterranean and its definition, the olive certainly occupies a prominent place because it thrives only within the band of the Mediterranean climate. It is said that the Mediterranean ends where the natural conditions for growth, development and yield of olives cease to exist. In that vein Istria it is divided into Mediterranean part (where the olive thrives) and the mainland part (continental, where the olive doesn't thrive). It is interesting that today when olive oil is again popular, economically profitable crops are extending to the areas in Istria where they were not present before.<sup>2</sup> In Istria, alongside the wine roads, olive oil roads have been for offered several years, based on the

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<sup>1</sup> On the website you can read the biography of the Istrian County Prefect Ivan Nino Jakovčić, and among the interesting information I would point out: “In April 2009 the Association of Chefs of Mediterranean and European regions awarded him the honorary title *Knight of cookery*. Among special interests his love of golf stands out, and he is regarded as a known and recognized sommelier. “ (<http://nino4zupan.com/category/nino/biografija> , May 1 2012).

<sup>2</sup> For example, in Selina, a village near Poreč adjacent to the inner part of Istria, olive plantations are moved and are farther away from the sea and at a higher altitude. It often happens that the older locals advise the young olive growers that in that bay, garden, field the olive will not thrive, although bordering their own olive trees. And often they are right. It is interesting to note that in Istria there is a female name Ulika (in the Istrian dialect *ulika* means olive). A hundred years ago it was a common name, particularly in the areas outside the Italian-speaking areas (coastal area), i.e. the inner part of Istria, specifically where the olives / olive succeeded. In the last ten years, the name Ulika is popular in Istria again, regardless of natural circumstances, more as a symbol of connection with Istria as a whole.

same principle as the wine roads. In specially arranged tasting rooms one can taste the oil. The olive mills are often the in the vicinity, and during harvest one can pick olives or at least look at the olive grove. Of course, oil products can be purchased too.

We have to add a variety of pasta - *pasta*, *pljukanci*, *fuži*, gnocchi, and also vegetables like red leaf lettuce, *broskva* (kale), asparagus etc. to the notion of Mediterranean cuisine.

In the guide through the Istrian restaurants and taverns, these facilities are divided into the three categories: those that offer Mediterranean food, those offering traditional Istrian food and those that combine both cuisines, the traditional Istrian and Mediterranean. In the table that follows it is evident that the local Istrian cuisine is not the same as the Mediterranean one, meaning that the Mediterranean cuisine includes dishes that are related the sea, while the local cuisine is heavily associated with pasta. The division listed in the guide leads us to the conclusion that the Mediterranean cuisine once belonged to the Italian ethnic group in Istria, who lived along the coast, while the inland cuisine, consequently of Croatian descent, was devoid of marine ingredients and was based on vegetables and pasta.

The division of Istrian cuisine on a sample of Istrian culinary facilities

<b>Mediterranean cuisine</b>	<b>traditional Istrian cuisine</b>	<b>traditional Istrian / Mediterranean cuisine</b>
- Seafood	- Truffles and meat under the bell, Istrian cow meat - gnocchi with venison, wild boar with polenta, roasted rooster	- <i>kanistrele</i> with asparagus cream in a glass, cuttlefish with asparagus, <i>pljukanci</i> with seafood, homemade bread
- <i>Pljukanci</i> with cuttlefish and asparagus, fish in the oven, gratin scallops in the oven	- Homemade ravioli, minestrone, homemade cakes	- Risotto with shrimp and asparagus, homemade <i>pljukanci</i> with shrimp
- Pasta Napolitano, seasonal fish	- Istrian cuisine, with seasonal offerings, mushrooms, asparagus, truffles	- Lobster with pasta, truffle dishes, home-made specialties
- brodetto and polenta, noodles with lobster, meat with truffles	- asparagus, truffles, homemade grilled meat, gnocchi, <i>pljukanci</i> , homemade pasta	- seasonal Seafood, homemade pasta, grilled meat
- Raw shrimp, seafood	- Homemade bread with truffles, olives and sausages	- Ravioli with seafood, lobster with pasta, mixed shellfish brodetto
- Spaghetti with lobsters, spaghetti with seafood, mixed grilled fish	- Istrian prosciutto, salami and rolled pancetta, pork loin with olive oil	- seasonal seafood, oily fish, homemade <i>fuži</i> , gnocchi, <i>pljukanci</i>

Table prepared according to *Istria the guide 2009*, by A. Gaberšček.

A thought of an ethno botanist called Paul Nabhan has remained a key factor in my aspirations to understand Mediterranean in the context of originality and authenticity, "the

*return to home* – to moments when I feel that our genes, our cultural traditions and the food we eat are in perfect harmony - so that the health of our bodies, community and the environment are one and the same thing “(Nabhan 2007:9). Quite subjective, as I get older, food grown in my immediate vicinity suits me better, such as asparagus I pick myself, eggs brought to me by my mother-in-law and prosciutto dry-cured by my aunt Marčela from my village. You got it, my favorite dish is *omelette* with *asparagus* and prosciutto, and *pljukanci* can be used instead of eggs. Of course, asparagus are stir-fried on the olive oil from my olive grove, and lately I’ve been salting olives. I still do not know how to make cakes ... I guess that flaw is in my genes, Istrian cuisine does not abound with cakes, or this is just my excuse. Scientists are getting more certain of the assertion that ethnic cuisines “have a solid foundation in ecological and evolutionary pathways, which are very important for the health of their consumers” (Nabhan 2007:17). According to Nabhan, there are evolutionary gastronomes, and they are those who interpret nutrition through evolution and through genes. I would tend to believe that genes are just a proof of genuineness, and also of the person’s authenticity. Thus, to support the syntagma of regional identity by a scientific pattern of genes, I once wanted to prove *istrianity* through the genetic code of the Istrian cow, popularly known as *boškarin*. I tried to prove that it belongs solely to Istria, since ancient times, and an interesting issue is whether, because it has been here since ancient times, it is good to eat. Specifically, once it was kept as a working animal for economic reasons, and only rarely used for food. Today, when it was replaced by technology, it is not proper to eat it because of our genes (though culturally conditioned), but it is proper because of its genes - genuinely Istrian and, correspondingly, Mediterranean too?

## Stone and Art

Along with food, the next association with the Mediterranean is certainly stone, both as a building foundation and a link with food (*sea rock brodetto*). Brodetto is one of the culinary and cultural pleasures associated with the Mediterranean. The main ingredients of the brodetto are precisely the fruits of the Mediterranean Sea. An interesting experience of one chef and representatives of the Istrian gastronomy was written in the book that talks about Istria „From Naples they drove us by car to the south, to the famed touristy Positano ... There, many restaurants competed in a culinary competition between Mediterranean cuisines. Our second course ... which was officially served was the “stone soup” ... The international jury is on its knees ... between nine Mediterranean regions of France, Italy, Morocco, Malta, Greece ... Istrian cuisine was proclaimed the best “(Orlić 2005:239).

Matvejević also highlights the stone soup:

“... which I’ve tasted several times, for which I feel obligated to submit an instruction: from a suitable place, where the sea is clean and not too deep, you should take two to three rocks, neither too big nor too small, darkened by lying on the bottom, preferably porous - the cavities are sometimes occupied by some shrimps. Cook them well in the pot, with tap water, or better yet, rainwater, until everything that has built up in the surface and inside gets out of them. You can add a bay leaf at the end of, a

thyme sprig, a tablespoon of wine vinegar and olive oil. If the right rocks have been selected, which had been in the sea for long and were permeated by it, it is not necessary to add salt. Such soup, known in the poor islands of the Aegean, the Ionian and the Adriatic Seas, was cooked by the Pelasgians, the Illyrians and the Liburnians. The stone soup is as old as poverty is in the Mediterranean. "(Matvejević 2006:173).

When you talk about associations on the Mediterranean and stones, surely the stone huts or *kažuni* immediately come to mind, and stone field walls which are abundant in Istria.

Josip Miličević, writing about the area of Buje, notes that this is part of the peninsula did not differ from the rest of rural Istria and the houses in this area have been ground level, often only one story, but there were two-story buildings that were built of stone, all of them bonded with ordinary moist soil. In the past, the houses were covered with straw or stone tiles, *škriple*, and in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, drains were getting used increasingly (Miličević 1985: 318). People built by the stacking of unprocessed natural stone without bonding, as *drywall* (for examples walls, *kažuni*, the stables), and by processing of stone blocks that the village builders, linking them with plaster, skillfully built with. Door and window lintels are carved into so-called *jerte*, "and the relatively small window panes (about 50x50 cm) are provided with full wood shutters, *škure*, as a protection against summer heat and winter winds" (Muraj 1998: 28). According to Nikočević, the oldest traditional house was a single story single-room building, which today barely survives, mostly used as a barn. In the distant past, they were built of stone or wood and covered with straw. They were in use until the end of World War I, in parallel with the predominant one floor houses with a patio (Nikočević 2005: 812). Traditional houses with a stone patio (*baladur*), a small, usually covered terrace leading to external stone steps, were prevalent in rural Istria. From the terrace one would go to the main area with a fireplace built from stone, from which one would go into another room (bedroom), and climbing internal wooden stairs could one could reach the loft, *šofit*, where the crops were kept.

Rural builders resorted to natural resources. Houses in Istria are built of stone, a raw material in abundance. "You would use the stone for everything. A place to live in, a cistern to draw water from, a field hut were we would hide from the rain in the field, from stone we will make limekiln, this small factory of lime" (Bijažić 1999: 15). "Stone was and still is an integral part of any building, from the palaces of the smaller coastal towns to *tigors* (small stables for small livestock), from *stancija*, large estates where more rural families live, to the house with a *baladur* and small stone huts (*kažun*), temporary shelters for farmers or shepherds" (Lago 1996: 96). Apart from the natural resources climate affects construction techniques - Istria is characterized by strong winds and specific hydrographic conditions. Although new generations forget this, Istria does not abound with sources of water, and the cisterns, *šterna*, have been an integral part of every rich Istrian home. *Šterna*, an important segment of life, is built from the finest stone. Depending on the wealth of the owner, a courtyard, *korta*, was around the house. *Korta* was surrounded with a high stone wall with a large gate, *portun*, a stone gate with iron or wooden doors to enter the courtyard, typical for Vlachs, Morlachs (people who have settled in Istria in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century), although



this type of *korta* could be interpreted as Friuli influence (Nikočević 1995: 814). These high walls are typical in the village of Radovani for example, and a beautiful example of a wide courtyard entrance for vehicular access, an iron *gate* within which there is a special smaller door for the passage of the owner is still in existence in Banki, a village near Baderna. In the enclosed courtyard area the most importantly place is the *dvor*, the stables - a space for livestock in wealthier homes, while in poorer homes, if they had livestock at all, the stalls would be located on the ground floor. Stone troughs to water the livestock were in the lower quality stone masonry barns.

Within the courtyard there is often *the lišjera*, a stone hut with a *fireplace* and a stack, and this space was used to cook for the pigs, but people would often wash and boil the clothes. Today, a renovated and augmented *lišjera* becomes a tavern or an apartment for tourists. In compact settlements the animal quarters were located on their edges and built with stone drywalls, while the roof was covered with nothing but tossed branches. Threshing circles were functionally located outdoors, next to the storage barn for hay. They are often paved with stone slabs and surrounded by a low wall. Because of their size, which sometimes reaches ten meters, the places for threshing, in addition to their primary function become gathering places for villagers (Muraj 2001: 46). The threshing circle is placed in front of the church on the still beautifully preserved *stancija* Tićan near Višnjani. Paved with *stone slabs* and surrounded by stone walls more than a meter high, it often served as a place to socialize in.

Istria is known for its many quarries, and one of the better known is *Montraker* in Vrsar, an inexhaustible inspiration for Edo Murtić. This is also the area in which the International Student School of Sculpture is held. The connection of the stone, the Mediterranean and the Istrian peninsula can be seen most tangibly through the Symposium of Mediterranean Sculptors in Dubrova, close to Labin. This visual art manifestation was founded in 1969. Its instigators and founders - the sculptor and painter Josip Diminić, art historian Branko Fučić and tourism operator Lucijan Martinčić gave up on the initial idea of opening art studios and gave the advantage to "stone and the suggestion to organize a symposium of sculptors" (Milevoj 1991:42). Except for the years 1980, 1981 and 1986, the Symposium has been held every year, during August and September. The workspace includes almost 35 acres which the municipality Labin ceded to the artists for permanent use. More than 86 renowned sculptors from home and abroad participated in the symposium, and they made the 79 sculptures that were set up in the park, while 16 of them were set up all over Croatia. Also, 16 sections of *the white road* were made. "The Mediterranean Sculptors Symposium grew from the attempt to save the *stancija* Dubrova to a creation of a real city of sculptures, which is now a representative of the Croatian cultural heritage, a unique blend of the recognizability of the Mediterranean pinewood and art" (Frankovic 2006:54).

From all of the above we can conclude that Istria is closely related to the stone, both as building material, and as a material for artistic expression. The perception of stone as a part of the Mediterranean food culture has been present since the entry into the Mediterranean along a rocky Gibraltar up to the Hellenic acropolis or Roman amphitheaters.

## Random notes on contemporary art, everyday life and the Mediterranean

Let me list a few interpretations of the Mediterranean through contemporary art, film, poetry, music, but also some personal experiences, my associations and those of my friends. Maybe the best way to experience the Mediterranean is watching movies by Gabriel Salvatores. *Mediterraneo*, which was awarded an Academy Award in 1990 for best foreign language film is a multilayered work which narrates about the Mediterranean through the German occupation of a Greek island through the eyes of Italian soldiers, and it features distinctive major and minor characters. In the last scenes it emphasizes the negative aspects of mass tourism, as well as personal life tragedies and the alienation that can be healed by the Mediterranean. The same director made the movie *Marrakech Express* in 1989, about a group of friends who travel to the Mediterranean (Italy, France, Spain and Morocco).

*Mare Nostrum* (cf. Mollat du Jourdin 2004, Matvejević 2006), the name the Romans affectionately gave to the Mediterranean, is a significant determinant of the Roman Empire and its relationship to the sea. In addition to claiming it, this phrase speaks of the importance of, but also the emotional relation to the Mediterranean Sea. The same phrase was used by the Istrian songwriter Franci Blašković on his first record *Adio Pola* “.. mare nostrum un bel kako nostro, the great military barracks on the coast.” Through this verse we can analyze the importance of the sea in Istria, or Pula. It is still extremely important, as it was in Roman times. Nowadays primarily because of tourism, but also for the defense of the country which is why the majority of the Pula archipelago was off-limits to the common people. Besides the military - strategic importance of the Mediterranean sea, now as well as then, the emotional relationship with it is extremely important and *vice versa*.

The Istrian poet Drago Orlić dissects and explains Mediterranean through the word game MED (honey) and TERAN (wine).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The interesting wordgame MEDITERRANEAN/MEDITERAN – MED (honey) and Teran, is the title of the book by D. Orlić. The terms honey and *teran* are used to identify Istrian identity, *teran* as a characteristic wine that is drunk and grown in Istria, and honey a term that evokes the richness, sweetness, the food of Hellenic (i.e. Mediterranean) gods. In addition, beekeeping and honey are new parts of the Istrian identity which are just nascent. This is confirmed by the event called the Days of Honey in Pazin. On the back of the book by Orlić we are offered a recipe of the Mediterranean snack that is prepared by the cooks of the Pula restaurant Valsabion which won them the competitive presentation of the Mediterranean cuisine in the Italian town of Positano.

### A MEDITERRANEAN SNACK

Potatoes under the baking lid  
(Sliced potatoes, olive oil sauce,  
anchovies)

Brodetto of sea rocks  
(Sea rocks, oysters, algae)

Pljukanci with date mussels

Sole a la Istria  
(sole fillet, olive oil, olives,  
Mediterranean aromatic herbs)

Kroštule with strawberry ice cream  
(home made kroštule, strawberry tree ice cream,  
brandy sauce with quince)

It is difficult to write about Mediterranean that I have not experienced by quoting and interpreting other authors. My personal Mediterranean, the Istrian Mediterranean, is my husband who picks *his great-grandmother's* (who never took a bath in the sea) *olives*, and Ulika and Val who sail and I cannot wait for them to return. And I look funny to myself because I thought that I could be able to explain it (the Mediterranean) in scientific and ethnological terms, epistemologically framed in objective limits.

To the librarian Matea from Ladrovići, the Mediterranean resembles a donkey. She must have read the *Mediterranean breviary*. And my *grandad* Frane (born in 1901) lived with a donkey in Dokići to his last day.<sup>4</sup>

## Education

Higher, university education in Istria is focused in Pula, and is also available in smaller places, but tuition has to be paid. So people interested in the Mediterranean agriculture can be educated in Poreč. The vocational Mediterranean agriculture course is open in the Istrian Department of the Polytechnic of Rijeka. Among the courses offered, other than those that are found in similar programs of studying, this course offers the subjects *Mediterranean pomology*, *Mediterranean husbandry* in the second year of study, and the subjects that evoke the Mediterranean without the *Mediterranean* adjective, such as *viticulture* and *olive production*. We start from the assumption that the pomology and husbandry are concepts wider than wine and olive oil, but also less specific for the Mediterranean so they were supposed to be described and / or made more attractive or just to justify the name of the course. The framework curriculum of the subject *Mediterranean pomology* lists the following fruit species that thrive in the Mediterranean: fig, tangerine, kiwi, lemon, orange, pomegranate and hazel (<http://www.veleri.hr/vočarstvomediteranaI>, April 18 2012). We can conclude from the framework curriculum of the subject *Mediterranean husbandry* that in this subject one will study about the primary livestock husbandry skills and about species which are adapted to the Mediterranean area. They will learn about the indigenous breeds, which are: indigenous Istrian cattle (*boškarin*), and indigenous breeds of sheep and goats (<http://www.veleri.hr/stočarstvomediterana>, April 18 2012 ). In the third year the subject Mediterranean

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Cheese with honey and pine nuts

Serve all of this with Teran, Malvasia, Gamay, Muscat.

<sup>4</sup> Let me list two Istrian / Mediterranean examples. I called my friend and proofreader from Glas Istre in Pula to confirm that all those words with which I contemplate the Mediterranean, Istrian - adjectives or something else. I wonder if I am bothering her, she answers that "there is no problem, they are just overeating *ćevapi* the Balkan way in the newsroom." And it doesn't even occur to them to "eat some sardines ... with the Mediterranean adjective." I ask a few questions my friend from Istria and her Greek husband via e-mail so that in a simple way, I would discover the perceptions of various parts of the Mediterranean. The answer was: "You cannot *do* Mediterranean in the computer, for these issues one should write a novel on each! Especially if you plan to publish our names, then we should only write something smart, not just mish-mash, No. 6. I would say that what I think is irrelevant because the maps say that Istria is part of the Mediterranean country Croatia. On number 3, do you mean what the symbols of Mediterranean are or which is the definition in my head? Recalling that both Lebanon and Morocco on the Mediterranean, it is clear that we do not have an image of the Mediterranean but that we think of Dalmatia, Montenegro, Italy, Greece (let's skip Albania), you see how it is all not easy to answer ... yes, yes ... ". (E-mail of the narrator friend)

pomology will cover the following Mediterranean cultures: Japanese apple, carob, peach, nectarine, almond, loquat, pomegranate and jujube (<http://www.veleri.hr/vočarstvomediteranaII>, April 18 2012). Similarly, in the subject *Viticulture I* the history of viticulture in the Mediterranean and the maintenance of soil in the Mediterranean area is mentioned. *Viticulture II* explains the agro-ecological conditions of grapevine cultivation and harvest specific to the Mediterranean area. The subject *Olive production* includes working on plantations in Istria. The *Viticulture I* emphasizes the specificity of Mediterranean production. In the case of other subjects the contents of their framework curricula contain no links with the Mediterranean or Istria, except in the case of *Rural forms of tourism* which will cover the experience of rural tourism in Istria. In the remaining subjects the references list Croatia in general (The climate of the Republic of Croatia, The Croatian foreign trade of agricultural goods, The preconditions for the application of marketing in Croatian agriculture, The fishing production in the Republic of Croatia and others).

We can conclude that among the sixty courses offered, among which the so-called general subjects such as foreign languages, the final paper and so on are counted, a dozen of them have the *Mediterranean* or *Istrian* adjective in their name or the content of the framework curriculum. Furthermore, the goal of the vocational study of Mediterranean agriculture is to “provide students with the knowledge they need for a comprehensive independent management of the agricultural farm in Mediterranean pedoclimatic conditions. The program includes the mastering of fundamental knowledge in natural sciences and biotechnological disciplines in the first part of the study, while later students gain specialized knowledge in applied disciplines of Mediterranean agriculture, with basic economic knowledge necessary for running the farm. The knowledge thus gained insures that students can cope with various technological and business situations and accomplish a successful management of family farms and the medium and small businesses in the market economy conditions taking into account the rapid development of technology in the Mediterranean” (<http://www.veri.hr/files/datoteke/brosure/poljoprivredni.pdf>, April 10 2012). In the educational segment the emphasis on the Mediterranean is evident primarily in the name of the subject. In the course of studying the focus on Mediterranean decreases. When I asked about the adjective *Mediterranean*, the semi-official response of the personnel was that it was there “to make it a little different from the previous viticultural and to make it a little wider, so it is not just about growing olives.” And in this case it seems to me that we start from the idea that the Mediterranean is concept which is extremely positive, and to which we ourselves wish to belong.

## Tourism of Istria and the Mediterranean

If you Google the term *Istria* the portal to Istria <http://www.istra.hr> will open first, and on its home page you'll first read: “*Istria - Green Mediterranean.*” On the same page, there are two photos – a seahorse in the azure sea and the ruins of the castle covered with vegetation. *Istria - Green Mediterranean* is written below the photos. Interestingly, the same slogan appears only on the home page versions for Dutch (*Istrie - De Groene Mediteraan*) and Russian translations, while in other languages (English, German, Italian) you will find only *Istria*. The next page has a section titled *Regions and towns*. Among fourteen sentences that are written on this page, only the two mention

the Mediterranean: “*Sail with us along Istria’s azure coast, set out with the rays of sunlight from the east slowly towards the west, plunging into picturesque Mediterranean motifs - coves and beaches, small boats floating peacefully, awaiting in the beauty of solitude*” ( <http://www.istra.hr/hr/regija-i-mjesta> April 11 2012). ” *There, you will be invited aboard the boat which, accompanied by melodies and flavours of the Mediterranean, takes you to Vrsar’s Sestrice and then on to the beaches of Poreč..*” (Ibid.) In other languages the text is identical. Next, the option to open the pages of every single town in Istria is offered. On the page of Poreč you can read the following passage: “*Rich tourist offer can also be found in the neighboring small places. Enjoy one of many restaurants and native Istrian taverns with all the enchantments of the real Mediterranean cuisine. Get rid of stress by visiting lovely picturesque villages settled in the hinterland and lead the calm “true Mediterranean” life.*” ( [http://www.istra.hr/hr/regije-i-mjesta/ Poreč](http://www.istra.hr/hr/regije-i-mjesta/Poreč) , April 11 2012.). Depending on the language, some translations do not mention the Mediterranean cuisine (German and Italian), but in every language “true Mediterranean” is translated.

Going through further sites about regions and cities, Vrsar/Funtana, Mediterranean and its derivatives are mentioned in two sentences: “*Since ancient times, Mediterranean sailors supplied themselves with drinking water from the nearby springs on the coast, by which both places got their names.*” ( <http://www.istra.hr/hr/regija-i-mjesta/vrsar-funtana/o-regiji> April 11 2012) and “*satisfy your need for the authentic Mediterranean dish and forgotten gastronomic delights completely!*” ( <http://www.istra.hr/hr/regija-i-mjesta/vrsar-funtana/o-regiji> , April 11 2012). The situation with the other languages is the same as in the previous chapter. In all the languages the Mediterranean is mentioned only in the context of Mediterranean cuisine while the sailors are mentioned only in translations to English, Slovenian and Russian.

Opening the page about Rovinj we are greeted with an entire range of associations with the Mediterranean. Thus, the first sentence reads: “*On the beautiful west coast of Istria, just underneath the Lim canal is the most romantic place in the Mediterranean!*” ( <http://www.istra.hr/en/regions-and-towns/rovinj/about-the-region> , April 11 2012), followed by: “*on the Mediterranean this (sentimental atmosphere a/n ) can only be found here, in the city whose romantic life began on the island ...*” ( <http://www.istra.hr/en/regions-and-towns/rovinj/about-the-region> , April 11 2012.). The next paragraph expands on the proximity of the picturesque Kanfanar where you can enjoy the “*numerous traditional taverns, flavors and scents of the sea salt melting with the aroma of the rich Mediterranean vegetation.*” (ibid.). The final sentences about Rovinj is “*in Rovinj and its surroundings you will enjoy the magical nature and learn about its incredible heritage, fill your heart with love and your memory with genuine romance still preserved only on this green corner of the Mediterranean.*” (ibid.) Translations into other languages are almost verbatim, with the exception of the English, German, Italian and Slovene where in the first paragraph the repetition of the word Mediterranean is omitted. Therefore in these languages Rovinj is associated with Mediterranean three times and in other languages four times.

On the pages about Labin and Rabac the adjective *Mediterranean* is mentioned twice: “*Taking a walk through the Mediterranean and European history ...*” and “*If you especially enjoy the sea, you will love the sailing boat regatta or the race of the rowboats, accompanied by lovely Mediterranean melodies*” ( <http://www.istra.hr/hr/regije-i-mjesta/labin-rabac/o-regiji> , April 11 2012). It is also mentioned twice in the translation to all other languages.

In the paragraphs about the region called Central Istria, the introduction reads: “*Central Istria is one of the rare Mediterranean regions adorned with the quality of unspoiled natural landscapes and rich*

heritage.” (<http://www.istra.hr/hr/regije-i-mjesta/srednja-istra/o-regiji> , April 11 2012). The Mediterranean region is mentioned in the translation to all the languages.

It is interesting that among the seven cities and regions offered the Mediterranean is not mentioned only in the pages about Umag/Novigrad and Pula/Medulin. It can be concluded that in some translations the frequent use of the word Mediterranean and its derivatives is somewhat avoided.

Next page that is offered to us is *Accommodation*. Everything is explained in two sentences, and the second reads: “*Choose your destination and enjoy exploring the Green Mediterranean on a holiday of your dreams.....*” ([http://www.istra.hr/hr/smjestaj/hoteli/popis\\_hotela](http://www.istra.hr/hr/smjestaj/hoteli/popis_hotela), April 11 2012). The remaining text amounts to the listing of hotels with basic information on the offer and accommodation. The Green Mediterranean is mentioned in other languages, noting that the texts intended for the Russian and Dutch are translated into English. In the same context, the Green Mediterranean is mentioned on the pages *Accommodation / resorts*.

On the page *Planning a trip* the Mediterranean is not mentioned while on the page *Activities and Attractions* which offered several subsections, it is mentioned in *Natural attractions*: “*highlighted with flourishing Mediterranean greenery, forests shading the Adriatic sea ...*” and “*Mild Mediterranean climate with 2,387 hours of sunshine a year ...*” (<http://www.istra.hr/hr/atrakcije-i-aktivnosti/prirodne-atrakcije>, April 11 2012). Since all translations are verbatim, the Mediterranean is also mentioned twice.

Next, in the section on *Coasts and beaches* we find “*your lungs fill with fragrances of the Mediterranean*” (<http://www.istra.hr/hr/atrakcije-i-aktivnosti/obale-i-plaze>, April 11 2012) in all languages.

In the section on gastronomy the Mediterranean is already mentioned in the title: “*Unique flavors ...of the Mediterranean cuisine*” and below in the text: “*if you pick a sprig of rosemary , bay leaves and basil ... it will carry the memory of the warm Mediterranean scent for a long time to come*” (<http://www.istra.hr/hr/atrakcije-i-aktivnosti/gastronomija>, April 11 2012). The translations in all languages are the same, apart from the Slovenian where it is simplified and the title mentions only *Gastronomy*.

And on the last section which we will analyze, whose link is on the home page *All about Istria*, the Mediterranean is mentioned in the section *Where are we?* “*Welcome to Istria, the Adriatic below the Alps, central Europe’s nearest Mediterranean*” (<http://www.istra.hr/hr/sve-o-istri/gdje-se-nalazimo>, April 11 2012). Istria is presented in all translations as the “nearest Mediterranean”.

On the page *Everything about Istria* we are offered the link to *Croatia* where there is a description of the advantageous geographical position of Croatia which “*is located in the southeast of Europe, on the intersection of the Mediterranean, Central Europe and Southeastern Europe (the Balkans). With its 1,185 islands, islets and reefs, numerous bays and beaches Croatia has one of the most indented coastlines in the Mediterranean ...*” (<http://www.istra.hr/hr/sve-o-istri/hrvatska>, April 11 2012).

Analyzing the web site of the Tourist Board of the Istrian County we can see that an important segment of the branding articulation is the presentation of Istria as a part of the Mediterranean. I interpret the emphasis and insistence on the Mediterranean Istria primarily as a marketing move in an effort to present itself as the northernmost part of the Mediterranean and, therefore, as the nearest to central and northern Europe. Also, such a way of promotion suggests a distinction compared to the non-Mediterranean Croatia (except Kvarner and Dalmatia that are not the nearest to the Western market). However,

I think that, besides the very secure Mediterranean foundations (sea, olive, and stone) and the cultural heritage, with overemphasis the meaning and authenticity of Istria in its entirety is lost.

Associations and comparisons with the Mediterranean are generally vague, for example: unspoiled Mediterranean region, the scent of Mediterranean, Mediterranean climate, Mediterranean sentimental atmosphere, the most romantic place in the Mediterranean, Mediterranean sailors, Mediterranean expression, lovely Mediterranean melodies, “true Mediterranean” - without the stress and haste. Most often, however, the phrase *Green Mediterranean* is used which is supposed to allude to the Mediterranean different from *marine blue and rocky white* and the phrase Mediterranean cuisine is also often used.

## Conclusion

*The Mediterranean is no longer the center  
of the world, but only a part of it  
- it will need time to present and accept itself  
as thus*

*(Matvejević 2006:30)*

Which of the Mediterranean determinant do the Istrians want to identify with? What do Istria and its inhabitants and important educational, tourist and cultural institutions communicate, or in what way do they represent Istria in the context of the Mediterranean? As we have seen in the previous discussions and analysis however, these are: good nutrition and agriculture, primarily based on the olive and olive oil, then wine, mild climate, sea, life in harmony with nature, stone, wisdom. Or maybe what was said about the course on Mediterranean cultures: *We did not know what to write in order to look different from the viticulture, and yet be so tempting – so it is Mediterranean.* This is what it seems to me - when no one knows exactly what to write, and wants something to be beautiful, lovely, good, green, romantic, authentic, then one always chooses *Mediterranean*..

On the other hand, Mediterranean Sculpture Symposium bases its work on the stone, and its formation is associated with the specific Mediterranean civic tradition and climate. Also, food and agricultural products thrive in Istria precisely because they are influenced by the Mediterranean climate, and are part of the original articulation and location of Istria on the Mediterranean. Today the Mediterranean heritage stands out, not Germanic or Slavic, certainly because of the popular belief that the Mediterranean way of life - as less stressful, nutritionally healthy, climatically pleasant, culturally significant and designated as a “cradle of knowledge” - is recognized and accepted as something essential and good. Worldviews that are now popular - balance, naturalness, return to authenticity and feelings sell well these days. The culture and knowledge and that little amount of Mediterranean tranquility sell well too, so the real Mediterranean people won't have them because they will sell them to their visitors for a few cents.

I believe that it is not necessary to analyze the authenticity and originality of the Mediterranean in Istria. Istria is Mediterranean and Germanic and Slavic, but for the present

purposes however, it decided to be more Mediterranean. All of this happened because this region is legitimately and legally focused on the tourism and westernization and turned towards the modern capitalist worldview.

What I find important is the veracity<sup>5</sup> and the mutual, albeit tacit, agreement between tourists and the local population. It is upon us to offer and present the best we can, and up to them to accept the grace and romance, pleasures for the palate, sentimental atmosphere, and the aroma of something they want to experience, aware of the ratio of truth and falsehood.

I conclude that Istria and the Mediterranean region like to present themselves and stand out through this dimension, especially in tourism-marketing sphere, when, as I have observed, the links with the Mediterranean are indeed exaggerated. The perception of reality and reality itself supplant each other (Matvejević 2006:181) according to the necessity, both intimate, and the economic – tourist one. And therefore, when necessary, Istrians like to escape, at least when they are unsafe – to the local cuisine that is different from the Mediterranean one (as much as it is valued), and hide inside their high (not typical Mediterranean, but built in stone nevertheless) gates, rarely greeting the unfamiliar and even more rarely inviting them to the house, quite the opposite to those ideas about the open Mediterranean mentality.

*Translated by: Tomislav Redep*

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<sup>5</sup> There is a very familiar and interesting interpretation of authenticity in tourism by the Australian anthropologist John P. Taylor which includes the concept of veracity or honesty. A meeting halfway between the tourist and the “actors” who present their culture is considered an “honest” cultural experience. Then authenticity can be positively recast in terms of local values. Instead of seeing the value in the disappearance of the “authentic object,” a moment of interaction can become a place that creates an authentic value (Taylor 2001:8-9).