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# THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF GOLI OTOK

## KULTURNI KRAJOLIK GOLOG OTOKA

### DOCTORAL DISSERTATION [SUMMARY]

Despite the fact that the island of Goli Otok is located in the northern part of the Adriatic Sea – the Kvarner region, where the first human settlements appeared at the end of the most recent glacial period, it had been devoid of any human history until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In a relatively short seven-year period, from 1949 to 1956 (after the announcement of the Informbiro Resolution in 1948), the country of Yugoslavia transformed the intact natural landscape of an uninhabited island with a unique Mediterranean geographic type (desolate rocky terrain, karst landscape, a complete lack of water, sparse aeolian vegetation) and a specific climate (island's exposure to summer insolation and cold „bora” winds during winter), into the largest secret political prison camp in the country – for the purpose of ideological re-education.

On carefully selected locations, amidst rocky valleys formed by the erosion of the landscape by ephemeral streams channeling into the Tatinja, Vela Draga and Vela Senjska bays, as well as the abandoned (anthropogenic) mining pits located on the Domalovica plateau, a total of four political camps were established (first camp „Stara žica”, second camp „Velika žica”, third camp „Ženski logor” – Women's Camp, and the fourth camp „Petrova rupa”). They consisted of prisoners' barracks contained within barbed wire enclosures or tall stone walls.

The buildings for the accommodation of inmates (wooden barracks or stone built pavilions) of the first, second and third camp – which were generally positioned on terraced platforms following the natural slope of the valleys – held some 115 to 200 prisoners in very cramped conditions. In the fourth camp, the building was sited at the bottom of an abandoned mining pit. The camp structures were gradually expanded throughout the island, beyond the limits of fenced-off areas: the camp administration buildings, areas for forced labour, quarries, manufacturing facilities and the first forested areas, as well as roads, paths and other infrastructure (docks, warehouses, rainwater cisterns, electrical substations, the fortification system, cemeteries), so that the contours of built struc-

tures and their archaeological layers are recognized, while their spatial organization, their function and their architectural framework can be surmised.

The shaping of the cultural landscape of the island, during the existence of the political camps, was greatly affected by the availability of natural limestone reserves, as well as the availability of prison labor; but also the intention of the camp administration, to create a secret isolated location hidden from public view, in which the process of forced ideological re-education could take place.

The prison complex which was established later (between 1956 and 1988) had continued the process of transforming of the natural landscape by erecting contemporary structures and manufacturing facilities, and continuing the afforestation of the island with the goal of improving the quality of accommodation, as well as the resocialization of criminal inmates. The preserved anthropogenic remains of the structures and areas of both the political camp and the more recent prison have been shaping substantially the present-day cultural landscape of the island and its ecosystem. Various anthropogenic structures have adapted to the natural environment of the karst landscape and to its Mediterranean climate with some local peculiarities, but so did the chosen methods of forced ideological re-education of political prisoners.

Along with the anthropogenic and natural determinants of the landscape's identity, there are also environmental factors of "naturally attractive" and "anthropogenically anxious" attributes with extraordinary panoramic views of the Kvarner-Velebit region, the prospects over the island's landscape and its structures; as well as the sensory component of the perception of the landscape as a site of pain and suffering, and as a place associated with numerous artistic expressions (literary, theatrical, artistic, painting and film work) and art works created by political prisoners during their stay on the island or later, from memory.

Despite its unique characteristics, the island of Goli Otok has not been recognized as a cultural landscape to this day, which is why – within the scope of this dissertation – a sys-

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Date of public defense: 14 October 2021

The dissertation has 457 pages, 10 chapters, 53 illustrations, 35 photographs, 47 figures, 16 tables, 4 contributions, 365 footnotes.

tem of valorization and categorization of the island's cultural landscape has been introduced, in accordance with the internationally and locally acclaimed methods and models. The chosen criteria for the valorization are based upon the determinants of identity, type and quality, while the landscape's features of authenticity, rarity, distinctiveness, diversity, harmony, ambiental quality, historicity, coherency and the possibilities of the cultural/natural heritage have been evaluated; with which the categories of culturally-historic, naturally-environmental and socioeconomic significance for the public community overlap.

Upon the completion of the evaluation procedure, it was concluded that the island of Goli Otok could be categorized as a cultural landscape of exceptional value and great national significance, and – considering the landscape's qualities and its highly rated historical value, its distinctiveness and the value of the elements of cultural and natural significance, in which a tragic historical event of human suffering, bound by various traumatic experiences, emotions and artistic inspirations, is firmly rooted – it can be classified with reasonable grounds into a category of associative (memorial) landscapes.

By analyzing the theoretical models of conservation and future use of the cultural landscape of the Goli Otok island, and comparing it to similar isolated sites associated with human suffering (Auschwitz – Birkenau, Gorée Island, Robben Island, Jasenovac, Buchenwald, San Sabba and Alcatraz), four cultural landscape models have been established: a memorial, scenic, manufacturing and an integral (hybrid) model. Considering that the island of Goli Otok is transportationally connected and located inside a region attractive for tourism and recreation within the Croatian Adriatic area, as well as in the broader Mediterranean area, the suggested models could be supplemented with other complementary educational, recreational and tourism services and programs, in a manner which does not devalue the primary function of the model and the qualities of the landscape as cultural heritage.