
Marina Blagaić

Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Zagreb
marina@ief.hr

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What is an Island Without a Museum?

Ethnological Reflections on Possible Representations of Šolta's Island Identity

An ethnographic survey conducted on Šolta, the island without a museum institution, in the period from 2007 to 2024 among different generations of the population indicated, among other things, the need for a place for interpretation of one's own culture. Drawing on museological theory that emphasizes the role of museums in the empowerment, and even formation, of communities, this paper will propose the identity-important periods and elements of Šolta's past and recent times mapped by ethnographic research as ideas for places of interpretation in an imaginary heritage institution and present the familiar initiatives of the local community and experts dedicated to the interpretation of Šolta's cultural heritage.

Key words: Island of Šolta, natural and cultural heritage, touristic and social development, representation of community identity, interpretation of culture

WHAT IS AN ISLAND WITHOUT A MUSEUM?

“The renewed pursuit of the establishment of interrupted cultural and social continuity comes only when one realizes how much the break with the past has impoverished the totality of life, jeopardizing economic development itself. The period of affirmation, with the initiation of many subjects, will require a large investment of spiritual work, the development of critical awareness and material means.” (Šlosar et al. 2000: 350).

This idea starts off several articles about the non-profit civic association of the Centre for Sustainable Development of Ekopark Pernat on the island of Cres and the Museum of Sheep Breeding as a successor to the activities of the Centre written over a period of more than twenty years. This testifies to the vision and persistence required to initiate in small communities, which are lacking primarily in human resources, and subsequently material resources, heritage projects and establish spaces within which elements of local culture are systematically collected, reinterpreted and taught in small environments. In this case, it was primarily sheep breeding, but also the entire ecosystem-related spectrum of activities of the people of Cres in the rural area of the Pernat peninsula. Although the activities of reflection on sustainable development began in 1999 with the establishment of the Centre, in mid-2008 they started on activities that led to the museum. First, they set up an exhibition on traditional sheep breeding, continued with publications, workshops, documentaries, the Wool Festival, the ecological and social project *Wool is (not) Waste / Wool is Useful Waste*, etc. (Šlosar 2023). This series of activities, which are methodologically related to the concept of community museums (cf. Morales Lersch and Cuauthémoc Camarena 2010), implementing active protection, and contributing to the partial revitalization of heritage, led to a permanent exhibition in 2019 thanks to the donations of families of Cres who collected and donated / borrowed numerous exhibits to show the vital branch of the former economy of Pernat. Legally, this initiative has gone from an association called the Centre for Sustainable Development “Gerbin” to the currently Rural Island Group – the Sheep Breeding Museum (ROG-MO), and is an example of the initiative of the creation of a place of archiving knowledge in an area where identity is endangered (cf. Šola 2003), and contributed to the preservation of knowledge of this distinctly depopulated environment with a “solid identity of island (Cres, Lubenice) ruralness” (Šlosar 2023: 141).

There are many such initiatives on Croatian islands, whether initiated by the island inhabitants themselves or by returnees, temporary residents, or weekenders. Although not always with as effective results as in Cres, but present enough to confirm the real need of island communities for archiving, transferring, and reinterpreting knowledge related to life in the past (Barešin et al. 2023, Damjanović and Matoković 2023, Dorotka and Plenković 2023, Dragojević Čosović 2023). What lies in the background of the establishment of island museums is often at least one such “crisis” of identity and an enthusiastic response of an individual or a small community, as well the enthusiasm of fellow community members to the activity, donation and creation of knowledge about themselves. An important report on Croatian island museums was published in 2023 as a thematic edition of *Informatica museologica*. Based on the presentation of the history and impressive activities of museums and collections on Croatian islands, editor Lada Dražin-Trbuljak (2003: 8) presented a thought in the editorial which I wholeheartedly support: “In order to exploit the potentials of islands and influence a better and more creative life of the local communities in which they operate, as well as the development of cultural tourism as a segment of the tourism industry, it would be extremely important to recognize the role of culture, heritage and, in particular, museums and museum professionals on islands.” These are texts about museums on the islands of Lošinj, Cres, Brijuni, Hvar, Brač, Korčula and Murter, interpretation centres on Zlarin and the Pelješac peninsula; museums and collections of religious communities at as many as 28 locations on Croatian islands and museums and collections of literary heritage. On 50 inhabited Croatian islands, 16 museums and 6 regional museum collections have been established in accordance with the Museums Act and 8 museums that were not established in accordance with the act, as well as 15 interpretation centres with 47 professional and auxiliary museum staff (ibid. 2023: 7-8). The presentation of the work of these museum

institutions testifies to the specific environment of the island, and the insularity of the working conditions of individual curators of specific orientations, the exceptional importance of their engagement in cooperation with the local civil sector and interested individuals, given that they are often the only or one of several cultural institutions on the island. The value of preserving and reproducing knowledge that is disappearing in island areas exposed to rapid social and economic changes due to the impact of tourism, population aging and changes in economic structure is also noticeable.

This paper will present the initiatives of keeping such knowledge on the island, about which there is no article in this thematic issue review, because it is an island without a museum, but with numerous initiatives that could potentially mature into its establishment.¹ The island is Šolta, a central Dalmatian island only an hour away from Split by ferry with 1975 inhabitants (according to the 2021 census) in seven island settlements. An ethnographic survey conducted on the island of Šolta in the period from 2007 to 2013 among different generations of the population indicated, among other things, the need for a place for interpretation of one's own culture (Blagaić Bergman 2014), which was included as a conclusion and need in the Development Strategy of the Municipality of Šolta until 2020 (2015). Continuously following the activities on the island from an ethnographic perspective even after 2013, when I completed research for the purpose of my doctoral thesis, participating in applied projects and working with the local community, I developed additional insights that are presented in this paper. Šolta still has no museum or heritage collection, but it at least has a publicly available gallery space above the Šolta library, in the complex of the former Bratska kuća, which displays Šolta's heritage that communicates with islanders and visitors through various activities. Some islanders see this fact as the result of an insufficiently developed awareness of the value and uniqueness of their own heritage and a sense of uncertainty about the existence of something valuable on Šolta. From this follows, for example, the ignorance of island residents about what makes Šolta's traditional construction and unique landscape special, which is further evident in inappropriate interventions on residential buildings and, sometimes unnecessary, demolition of dry-stone walls. On the other hand, the fact that there is no place to interpret the culture of one's own island motivates some people of Šolta to collect island heritage, by archiving objects or writing down memories of island life in the past.

Drawing on museological theory that emphasizes the role of museums in the empowerment, and even formation, of communities (Kelly 2006b, Ballesteros and Ramírez 2007, Vella and Cutajar 2017), this paper will propose the identity-important periods and elements of Šolta's past and recent times mapped by ethnographic research as ideas for places of interpretation in an imaginary heritage institution and present the familiar initiatives of the local community and experts dedicated to the interpretation of Šolta's cultural heritage. "A community can only emerge through shared experience and shared use of the context of meaning. These contexts of meaning shape the situations in which participants create values" (Ballesteros and Ramírez 2007: 677-678). The museum heritage institution was viewed as such, with all the awareness of curatorial responsibility and the social implications of heritage creation (cf. Crook 2007, Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 2006).

1 This research was carried out within the project *Island Ethnographies – Island Heritage and Environmental Futures as Drivers of Island Community Development* (BAŠOTOK), which was financed by the National Recovery and Resilience Plan 2021 - 2026 Next Generation EU (Program funding of the Institute for Ethnology and Folklore Research, 2024 –2027, project code: 2011).

Thinking about Šolta, island museums and the dynamics and levers of creating communities, an analogy of the development of a child seemed appropriate. The healthy psychological development of a child primarily takes place in the processes of mirroring with the mother or another person in a parental role. Positive emotions encourage the repetition of certain actions, and negative and worried expressions on the parent's face signal to the child what in their behaviour should be changed. Mirroring sadness from a hit develops compassion for oneself and others. It would be naive to think that mirroring is always appropriate. On the contrary, inappropriate mirroring can cause a lot of damage. The most dangerous, however, according to experts, is indifference, lack of mirroring or inconsistency in reactions. It can cause a sense of invisibility, a lack of self and a clear self-image. Children build their own identity through relationships and belonging expressed through mirroring. Let us now imagine that the community is a child, existing for some reason, whether because of belonging to the same geographical area, value, or spiritual specifics, etc., and its maturity and healthy development is achieved precisely in the processes of representation of oneself that take place through artistic, folklore, political and similar expressions of awareness of one's own characteristics, needs, and ultimately visions of the future. "Being a subject involves self-knowledge, and a community museum is a tool for communities to build collective self-knowledge. Multiple forms of participation contribute to this goal; all members of the community who are involved in the museum by choosing the topics they will study, participating in oral history or design workshops, interviewing, collecting objects, taking photos or other contributions, learn more about themselves and at the same time learn about the community to which they belong. They build a collective interpretation of their reality and their history" (Morales Lersch and Cuauthémoc Camarena 2010: 141). This also leads us to frequent discussions about the connection between museums, heritage and community, where "it is difficult to distinguish which one leads from the other – is the heritage building the community or the community building the heritage?" (Crooke 2007: 1) And what is the role of museums there?

The ethnography of life on the island of Šolta before, as well as in modern times, led me to think about the support that museum institutions can provide to a particular community, especially in moments of crisis and change. One of the many contributions on the important role of museums in maintaining communities is a study of a small museum founded in Malta that deals with the contribution of the Bir Mula Heritage Museum to the idea of the community itself about itself (Vella and Cujatar 2017: 30–43). Founded in 1997 as a private initiative, this museum independent of city and state foundations, structures and ordinances has encouraged a number of activities, primarily educational ones, which over decades of work have had a positive impact on the self-perception of the said community and the negotiation of a stereotypical image of one's own negative characteristics (ibid.). In this regard, and continuing with the above analogy, the Šolta community as a community without a museum can be seen as a child who does not have the opportunity for consistent mirroring. Although a child can be very creative and innovative, without mature guidance, they do not have the opportunity to realize what is truly important, decisive for their future, and so much talent passes by invisible and unrecorded. In my opinion, the Šolta community is a community without sufficient knowledge of itself, primarily its power and strength, but also vulnerability, especially environmental. For example, there is insufficient knowledge about sailboats that drop anchor in the bays of Šolta and fill the vault in the short term, but leave an irreparable mark on the seabed, destroying the endemic *Posidonija* (popularly called "lažina"), a grass that covers it and is essential for maintaining life in the sea.

Who should notice and help the community to mirror? They themselves, but certainly we ethnologists and cultural anthropologists as well, or, as I would dare to call us during ethnographic

endeavours, a type of *community therapists*. Whoever is *stuck* in ethnography, to use Geertz's favourite adjective related to our methodological procedure, i.e., the thick description characteristic of qualitative ethnographic research (Geertz 1993), may have similar experiences. Namely, thick descriptions require thick experiences, immersion in contacts that are more than a seven-day field observation or a narrow-targeted focus on a particular element of customs and the like, interpretation and a broader understanding of the context. Who can better continuously undertake ethnographic research, and then possibly parent the mirroring of the community, than a local ethnologist, employed preferably in a public independent cultural institution – a museum. In this paper, I propose curating the culture of Šolta in the broadest sense of the word as a proposal of an island museum for the community. This proposal came about during decades of contact with the community, both formal and informal.²

INITIATIVE FOR THE REPRESENTATION OF ŠOLTA CULTURAL HERITAGE

The institutional efforts to establish the Šolta heritage collection, and in the future the museum, are related to the house where Marko Marulić stayed in Nečujam, as well as the 1960s, which I managed to reconstruct according to study material. Later initiatives were mainly related to the activity of a local expert on cultural and natural heritage of Šolta, Dinko Sula, and most significant was an exhibition held in 1999. The next major undertaking was the scientific research project of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, which in 2007 produced the project *Šolta in the palm of your hand* in cooperation with local government and associations. During the following years, the centre Bratska kuća (Confraternity house) was renovated, which hosted numerous exhibitions, and the interpretation of island cultural assets continued in open-air environments. In recent years, the context of tourism development has been most responsible for the community's work on shaping tourism products based on the characteristics of local specifics of culture, lifestyle, diet, etc. Ethnographic and historical material are certainly the most common choice when curating the culture of Šolta, but they are not the only one. In recent years, the focus has been on biodiversity and cultural and artistic activity of Šolta's individuals. In the following paragraphs, I will present the matter in more detail.

- 2 I am originally from the island of Šolta, through both of my parents, although one of my grandmothers was from the Dalmatian hinterland, she was called Mare Vlajna (op. prev., "Vlaji" are called the people from the Dalmatia hinterland) and I was often told that I have more in common to that side of the family by the agility to sail through life. Such views were already an indication of how islanders were thought to be insufficiently agile. "Vlaji are simply too capable", our family used to say. Then what are islanders? I remember my *baba*, as we affectionately call grandmothers on Šolta, telling me that when she got married, she came to Maslinica with her wooden furniture and nice cutlery, and my grandfather's entire family still (in the 1950s) ate from one bowl, because poverty was severe. On the other hand, I remember one time when I walked down from the olive orchard with my *baba*, who carried a bundle of small wood on her back and started talking: "Now when you start school and your teacher asks you what you did during the holidays, you tell her how you went pruning olives with your *baba*, and the sun was coming down behind seven small islands." It was one of the moments of separation from the narrative of difficult island life and sharing an almost philosophical presence and awareness of the beauty of pastoral island karst. I still remember the light in that moment, the sunset and the dry stone mounds we descended over, the islands on the horizon and the satisfaction with the life of my *baba*, at least in that brief moment. If grandma had social media, she might have taken a *selfie* with her granddaughter and post: #that thing when you are bathed by the sunset, and maybe if Šolta had a museum, she would have *tagged* them #crowds of ancestors. However, this representation remained in my memory and continued to describe to me my own island belonging from which I continue to build this text.

I will first present the initiatives and results of the cultural and tourism project initiated by ethnographic research at the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research and cooperation with related initiatives of presentations of Šolta's heritage on the island. Furthermore, I will present the sources and initiatives of local institutions, associations and engaged individuals that were focused on the interpretation of heritage, as well as the recent focus on Šolta's heritage by tourism activities.

At the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, the project "Traditional Culture, Globalization and Local Practices" on traditional culture in modern times was launched in 2007 by prof. Zorica Vitez. The segment of the project *Traditional Culture and Cultural Tourism: Island of Šolta* related to the application of ethnological research with the aim of enriching the tourist offer on the island of Šolta in the presentation of its traditional culture, i.e. ethnographic heritage, with the assumption that it will be interesting for domestic and foreign guests to learn something about the former and current way of life on the island, about customs and beliefs, traditional economy, and the social life of islanders (Vitez 2007: 37). One of the goals of the project was to change the established perceptions of people of Šolta of tourism, their views of the environment in which they live and the image of their island in the eyes of visitors (ibid.: 38). For this purpose, the project envisaged activities that sought to sensitize the local population to the issues of the island landscape being endangered and the need for active efforts to stop the devastation and eliminate its consequences, especially the collapse of traditional construction. Scientists and experts gathered on the project (Zorica Vitez, Aleksandra Muraj, Joško Čaleta, Vido Bagur and Marina Blagaić) dealt with traditional forms of business (olive growing, viticulture, fishing, maritime, lime production), social life (festivities, fraternities, village administration), emigration, folklore (oral literature/stories and traditions, dance, music), church folk singing, traditional construction, food and clothing (national costumes). One of the topics chosen to present the possibilities of cultural tourism was traditional construction, and in 2007 the exhibition "Culture and Tourism: Island of Šolta" was held, with examples of good practice of preserving and restoring traditional culture and with examples of neglected and dilapidated architectural heritage as a potential for development. The following year, an exhibition on Šolta beekeeping was held, which encouraged the collection of objects and the establishment of an informal collection. The objects were donated to the future Šolta ethnographic collection by Filomena CeciĆ-Venjir, collected by Dinko Sule in 2009, and stored with the Tvrdić family in 2010 until an adequate exhibition space is established.

The enthusiasm observed on the island for the development of a comprehensive cultural and tourism project also resulted in a two-day strategic planning, where the project was further shaped with representatives of local government, Šolta entrepreneurs and farmers, representatives of associations and interested individuals. The fact that a person who does not live on the island led this strategic planning was crucial for the constructive work of otherwise opposed island individuals or representatives of different political options, but it became clear that visions of development did not differ significantly, but that those intolerances were drawn from some other family and business reasons, often inherited from earlier generations. It has also become clear that communication and opening up a space for discussion enables the channelling of accumulated parochialist urges and that they are partially mitigated by getting to know the "other side". Systematic work to bring together different voices of the community on socially relevant issues from either the past or the present is often the role of museum institutions and the accompanying activities of exhibitions.

At the Šolta participation workshop, it turned out that the local community recognizes the traditional way of life as the basis for the presentation of life on Šolta and that they see the future of the island in the close connection of agriculture and tourism. The three main brands of Šolta are Šolta rosemary honey, wine from the local Dobričić variety and olive oil from the Levantinka variety. The originality and/or specificity and longevity of these three foods was understood as a comparative advantage of the island. The idea *Small island – we offer it whole* was adopted, and a project was developed to design and develop a culture and tourist trail that encompasses the entire island, talking about its past and present. The demand for organic and local products has been recognized as an opportunity to use high-quality agricultural land and the preserved environment of the island for the purpose of such production and thus establish a sustainable pattern of economic use of the island environment.³ The preserved environment and rich cultural and historical heritage of the island are recognized as a trump card in the formulation of selective forms of tourism: ecological, cultural, rural, sports and recreational, gastronomic, nautical and other. "Tourism affects and builds identities, but identities can also build or obstruct tourism" (Ballesteros and Ramírez 2007: 685). Global trends in the development of selective forms of tourism have also reached Šolta through this project, but also through numerous programmes of competent regional and national institutions. Šolta is relatively untapped in terms of tourism, unlike its neighbouring central Dalmatian islands and the surrounding area of Split. It was a good time to map the potential for cultural and rural tourism. Also, it was still "on time" for the response of the local community to the pressure of tourism and the creation of the desired image. Participants were divided into groups that dealt with the environment, the community and the economy and were asked to formulate the strategic goals of their action. The problem of lack of community and poor interpersonal relations should be solved, it was concluded with the guidance of the moderators, by raising awareness of common identity and interests. For this purpose, there is a need for projects such as communal spaces that would meet the cultural, entertainment and educational needs of the community, as well as spaces dedicated to the needs of the younger population of islanders.

One of the tangible results is a cultural and tourism project called *Šolta in the palm of your hand*, which unifies the goals of various sectors and puts them within the framework of sustainable development of cultural tourism. The project mapped over 100 interpretive points, some of which were set up in the coming years, and over 150 locations for setting up handmade signposts that were set up on the island and which lead to getting to know the island through old field paths. This is a combination of the proposal of the mentioned project of the Institute, as well as the parallel initiative of four non-profit civil organizations on the island of Šolta, which designed a joint project called *Paths are our heritage as well* and thus expressed the need and readiness to design thematic walking routes around Šolta. In cooperation with the local government and the tourist board, representatives of the Ecological Tourism Association of Šolta and the associations "Mala truba", "Rusmarin" and "Šoltanski trudi", during 2011 and 2012, set up interpretive boards for individual monuments of traditional and architectural heritage on the island and numerous handmade signposts. They direct the discovery of the island by walking along agricultural and firefighting routes and "tell the story" of life on the island.

The interpretation boards that we set up in Šolta as part of the work of the institute project

3 "Report from the workshop on defining a common development strategy and operational plan for the island of Šolta held on 11th and 12th March 2010". Mjesto pod suncem d.o.o.

were partly related to the monumental heritage of Grohote (Slavić Tower, the Church of St. Stephen, the location of the election of the duke), then topics related to the community of Šolta (the Confraternity of St. Stjepan in Grohote, Šolta emigrants – placed in the street bearing the same name, the First School Building, the Community Centre, the Šolta Music Choir Olinta, Luka Bezić's Hotel Paron), classical themes of traditional culture (traditional architecture), but also themes from more recent and modern times (the Volunteer Fire Department of Šolta, the Jugoplastika Toy Production Factory), and two boards related to Šolta's naive art painters (Eugen Buktenica and Marin Kalajzić). The boards mostly used the material from the Documentation of the Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research and the private archive of Dinko Sula.

The wooden signposts placed around the island intersect it along the paths of former labourers⁴. In the following years, this project was developed as part of the work of the Culture and Information Centre and some other segments were interpreted. It is especially interesting that in the central island park near the municipal building, space was dedicated to the poetry of Vesna Parun, a native of Šolta, who, although she did not spend much time on the island during her life, still wanted to be buried on Šolta. Her poetry, with the translation of poems into English, was printed on boards and placed on the eastern wall of the central island park. This project paved the way for the creation of a kind of eco-museum or open-air museum and certainly raised awareness of the possibilities of knowledge transfer, but also of creating narratives about oneself. The board placed on the Jugoplastika toy factory had a printed photo of the ball that was produced in the factory, with the image of Zagi on which *Yugoslavia* was written in small letters. A few months after the board was set up, this small inscription was hollowed out, and was no longer visible. This intervention points us to the communicativeness of the process of legacy and its truly important role in processing one's own past, but also the present of a particular community. This process is comparable to the role of museums in reinterpreting the attitudes of communities towards collected objects in the present by illustrating how current generations perceive their own identity and what they consider important to remember (cf. Antoš 2014).

All the inhabitants of Šolta I spoke to recognize as positive and necessary the private and activist initiatives for collecting material related to traditional culture, for example, the collection of Nikola Mateljan in Rogač, the collection of Anka Vidan in Stomorska, the exhibition activities of library manager Željka Alajbeg, the activities of members of the association "Rusmarin", as well as the records of Dinko Sula published in the Šolta yearbook *Baščina*. Particularly valuable is the collection of items prepared by Dinko Sula and shown within the exhibition "Gvozd, lata i drivo moje ditinstva" in 1999 in the island library (Marko Marulić City Library – Grohote Branch). A small portion of the ethnographic items set up at this exhibition are still waiting for a permanent space, while a large part was returned to the Šolta families who keep them in their households. The author of the text on the exhibition, a librarian and a long-time dedicated archivist of native knowledge about Šolta, emphasized even then that all these exhibitions were "proof of our roots, and only those who know their roots know who they are" and suggested that the people of Šolta preserve their antiquity in the name of the future by establishing the Native Museum of Šolta (Alajbeg 1999: 42). The source of data for numerous topics of Šolta's past and present is the yearbook *Baščina*, edited by Dinko Sula and published since 1991. It was conceived as a place of publication of island poetry, but from the third issue it grew into a yearbook on Šolta culture, both traditional and contemporary, with news coverage and chronicles. For the last decade, in

4 The signposts were enthusiastically done by the late Tonči Blagaić Buco.

addition to culture, *Baščina* has been regularly dedicated to the natural heritage of the island, bringing knowledge about Šolta's biodiversity. In the absence of a place for interpretation of their own history and culture, this yearbook is the only place where the people of Šolta can systematically archive the knowledge about the island. Also, everything written about Šolta is stored in the Native Collection of the Island Library in Grohote, which is a branch of the Marko Marulić City Library in Split.

One of the activities of the representation of local heritage and its reinterpretation in modernity is related to the popular piety and the work of the Confraternity of St. Martin in Donje Selo. Although they no longer have a socio-regulatory function, the confraternities on the island still promote solidarity and Christian doctrine, but mainly by organizing cultural events. The emphasis on the importance of the inherited tradition, expressed through their activities and in the ordinances, points to the self-reflexive and self-interpretative phase in which island communities found themselves, due to the overall archiving of knowledge and the heritagization of memories that characterizes modern society. In this respect, the most active at the moment is the Confraternity of St. Martin in Donje Selo. One of the activities of the confraternity is joining the European Cultural Itinerary of St. Martin, symbolically marked by placing the foot of St. Martin on the village fraternal house in 2010. Thus, this small Šolta village, which currently has less than 100 inhabitants, was included in the network of more than 150 localities across Europe, which has set the same foot and board. Incorporation into the system of symbolic connections ensures the visibility of Šolta in the resulting alternative map of Europe.

Placing the foot of St. Martin on the fraternal house in 2010 encouraged members of the confraternity to renovate the house, organize artists from Šolta to paint and donate works depicting the life of St. Martin, to recall the customs that this confraternity carried out in the past, write them down and present them (Blagaić 2010), to renew the flag of the Confraternity, place it next to this board and the board with information on the construction of the fraternal house itself and start restoring old, handwritten songbooks of church folk singers. And this is an illustrative example of the impact of global processes on a small rural community. However, they would not be present in this way if there was no vivid memory of coexistence according to the rules of confraternization in the community itself.

In Grohote, too, the fraternal house was renovated, once owned by the Confraternity of St. Stephen the First Martyr, and now a public space owned by the Municipality of Šolta. In this complex there is a gallery space, an island library, and a small display of a wooden grape press.

The need to establish a local museum was again addressed during 2023 in Šolta, within the framework of the activities of the Confraternity of St. Nicholas in Maslinica, where a former fraternal house was renovated and converted into a gallery space. Although it is very small, this gallery is important because it has become one of the few public social spaces in the rapidly touristified settlement of Maslinica. During August 2023, the exhibition "How people once lived in Maslinica – towards the establishment of a native island collection" was opened, which, in addition to the billboard with professional texts on the history of Maslinica and the confraternity itself, also exhibited an ethnographic collection consisting mostly of items collected by the late Mirjana Blagaić and Tihomir Glavurtić, and during the installation of the exhibition, the inhabitants of this former fishing village brought from their taverns items related to the former basic industry and additionally explained and narrated memories of former life. This example also shows that the community of this small town, which has long since ceased to base its existence on fishing and maritime industries, continues to build its identity through a common perception

of its own heritage, and thus builds a sense of belonging to the community. This is also confirmed by the perception of tourism as a context for communicating the identity dimensions of the community (cf. Urry 1990).

During 2024, additional activities were made that valorised Šolta's cultural heritage in the wake of these examples. As part of the work of the Tourist Board of the Municipality of Šolta, three thematic trails have been designed and marked: the Trail of Water and Life, which leads through the villages in the interior and along the Šolta field, the Trail of Vela Straža in Gornje Selo and to the highest point of the island of Vela Straža, and the Trail of Open Views, which leads around the village and the surroundings of Maslinica. The movement on the trails was directed by the symbol of the owl Ćuvita, as the people of Split called the people of Šolta Ćovitari first in a pejorative sense, and later in a sympathetic tone.

Also, this year, the restoration of the protected cultural property owned by the Municipality of Šolta in Nečujam began, which is important mainly because of its memorial value related to the stay of Marko Marulić on the island of Šolta. The future purpose of the Marko Marulić House will be an interpretation centre with the aim of presenting a significant cultural heritage about the life and work of the father of Croatian literature. Similar projects of interpretation centres are prepared as part of the work of the Culture and Information Centre of the Municipality of Šolta, and are related to the interpretation of olive oil production in Šolta and the establishment of the Memorial Room of Vesna Parun as part of the activities of the municipal library.

Particularly impressive is the author's project of one of the local guides who designed a presentation of island life through the life of a woman "An Island Woman – storytelling about life on the island". This was primarily encouraged by the initiative from the top, i.e. the tender of the Split-Dalmatia County for the development of stories as part of the tourist offer. After researching the literature on Šolta, from scientific articles to prose and poetry of her fellow islanders, conversations with women in her own family, especially with her grandmother, guide Sandra Marie Vrandečić presented in summer of 2024 the first costumed interpretive walk on the island: "A Woman from Šolta - one life on the island" (Promo 2024). A woman from Šolta from the beginning of the 20th century in the clothes worn on the island at the time was warmly received by the local population, who themselves said that they learned things about their own island that they did not know. With regard to the reasons for designing her colourful and attractive costumed interpretive walk, author Sandra Marie Vrandečić says that all industrial revolutions and technological advances have led to drastic changes in the civilizational sense that all this happened too quickly before our eyes, so her intention with this story is to raise awareness among visitors, as well as local members of younger generations about the need to preserve the environment. In the walk, she reflects on the context of life, the time and space of limited resources, that is, the use of exclusively natural resources that man used by refining them with his two hands and natural materials and being closely connected with nature and the environment in which he lives. "All my islanders of older generations, poets, writers and chroniclers of that past era, were a great help and inspiration to me. Through my woman from Šolta, I brought all this back to life, the past into the present."

The presented initiatives are heterogeneous in their methods and selection of elements of the Šolta culture, but homogeneous in their intention and need to develop knowledge about this small island community. Whether it is a context of a scientific project carried out outside the island itself or a project developed within family farms and the development of the tourist offer, the life of Šolta in the context of the island environment is questioned (Promo 2024).

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON REPRESENTATIONS OF ŠOLTA ISLAND IDENTITIES

The paper presents the initiatives of the Šolta community on the island, but also outside the island, aimed at recording, representing and revitalizing the knowledge specifically related to the local island lifestyle in the past and present. They point to the need to further elaborate the ways in which the island of Šolta can articulate and communicate its unique island identity, which is important not only for the development of tourism on the island but also for the overall social development. Strengthening the local identity and valorisation of the cultural and natural heritage of the island of Šolta in the context of intense cultural and economic globalization takes place as a natural response of the community. This could be systematically supported by the establishment of a museum, native collection or cultural centre that could become an active factor in the empowerment of the local community (cf. Blagaić Bergman 2014).

Understanding culture as an overall way of life, and heritage as selected elements by which a certain community tells a story about itself, Šolta would benefit from a museum that would put emphasis on the island identity or specificity of the Šolta culture, given the surrounding sea, but also the historically based and modern strategies of survival and life on the island. In this respect, I understand island identity as the result of the experiences and practices of its inhabitants, where each island shapes its own island identity (cf. Vannini and Taggart 2012, Blagaić Bergman 2014). Based on all of the above and the research conducted on Šolta over nearly two decades, the following topics stand out as key points of the story of the Šolta island: stone and hands – island survival from Illyrian hillforts to dry-stone mounds, limestone structures and water reservoirs; water and the relationship with the specifics of the island environment; childhood and schooling on the island; confraternities and their socio-regulatory role in the past; emigration and island mobility; industry on the island and emancipation of women; Šolta naive painters; the relationship of Šolta with the nearby mainland, especially Split; the island in modernity – a nostalgic place of belonging and return, the island in the future – environmental changes.

I believe that a professional presentation of the topics listed above, based on a contemporary understanding of museum activity, could noticeably influence the development of a positive attitude of the population towards their own history and life on Šolta in general, which many today see in a negative rather than a positive sense. Strengthening the self-awareness of the local population on several levels is also reflected in the selection and development of economic activities. Understanding museums as an aid in building community by expressing and representing the identity of the community with all its diversity (cf. Crooke 2007), the Šolta island museum has the potential of developing solidarity and empathy (cf. Nikolić Đerić 2023) and expressing the needs and hopes of different members of the community. Reflecting on the effects of community museum work, Kelly concludes that museums will finally “have the opportunity to influence, challenge, and sometimes change the way visitors think, inspiring them to take action to address big issues and be more informed citizens in an increasingly globalized world” (Kelly 2006a). This is exactly what the presented initiatives of interpreting Šolta’s culture have achieved, raising awareness of possible directions of their own island future, and in further combining these efforts, it is necessary to form an umbrella institution with experts that Šolta’s archaeological, ethnographic, natural and other heritage needs; a place where the people of Šolta will think about themselves, meet with themselves, and negotiate about the future. The mention of the interdependence of temporality in terms of reaching for the past in the present in the name

of the future often serves as a tool for political demagoguery, while the mentioned practices on the island of Šolta and the narratives of the authors and their recipients confirmed how important this really is for the lives of small, demographically vulnerable communities under great pressure from tourism. Reflecting on the past and the present in the name of the future is the need of every person and community, and the context of a museum as a public infrastructure would provide the people of Šolta with cooperation and support of the profession.

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