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Učka Nature Park: A Protected area as a place Dedicated to Social Memory

The concept of heritage, whether natural or cultural, is at the heart of the establishment of protected areas as a manifestation of the desire to preserve a now endangered state, a process or a phenomenon inherited from the past. The author analyzes different ideological basis for this urge for preservation it and from that perspective he examines his own work as a scientific assistant for cultural heritage in the Učka Nature Park. The history of the mountainous Istria is presented intertwined with different examples of the storage or retention of social memory in that landscape, and in this context, it examines the social role of protected areas as a mechanism of transfer and creation of social memory.

Keywords: social memory, heritage, tradition establishing, protected areas, cultural landscape, Učka Nature Park

I. What is the purpose of heritage?

The mountainous area in Istria, the mountains of Učka and Čićarija became the subject of my study and work as a scientific assistant for the cultural heritage in the Public Institution of Učka Nature Park. The concept of heritage, whether natural or cultural, is located at the heart of the establishment of such protected areas as a manifestation of the desire to preserve or even revitalize a now endangered state, process or phenomenon inherited from the past. The Management Plan of the Nature Park, the fundamental document outlining the management policy which is being carried out over this area, starts with the following description:

“The Učka Park is an area of high natural, cultural and aesthetic value; a landscape formed by natural processes over millions of years and further shaped by human activity for millennia. These complex interactions of people and nature have created a unique landscape that now has such a large and varied significance for us. In the 21st century those interactions could lead to disruption of the landscape without careful management and would reduce the natural, social and cultural value of this area. “(Grgurev, 2010: 10)

Furthermore, in the part of the plan which sets out the strategic and operational objectives of park management, the fundamental vision is laid out:

“PP Učka will remain a preserved mountainous area, a place of unique natural and cultural diversity and way of life and of the utilization of natural resources that best reflects the legacy of rich tradition.

It is a place where locals and visitors understand the importance of preserving nature and where they are allowed to enjoy the values of the park. “(Grigorev, 2010: 54)

The same vision was streamlined in the process of participatory planning of park management at a workshop which I attended personally and whose participants were local residents and other stakeholders in this area, and employees of the park. It is a well-intentioned amalgam of common desires and aspirations of these groups. But let's demystify this discourse in order to point out the pitfalls that have been set in front of us. The urge to preserve the heritage comes from several ideological sources.

The preservation of vital resources and the memory of mankind?

One of the ideological sources stems from the scientific discourse of conservation in which the emphasis is on resources and monuments important for the survival and the cultural continuity of the human species. Although most agree with this attitude, it is unfortunately often translated into practice with the problems that come from different viewpoints of those who implement policy and those over whom these policies are implemented. A historian of the environmental movement Douglas R. Weiner mentioned the problematic elitist dimension of conservation:

“Like many others, I believed that protected territories could be only an unmitigated good thing - that is, until I became more familiar with the hidden history of parks. [...] one person's “virgin nature” might be another's inhabited landscape, and that at times class interests have intruded into the process of defining “virgin nature” to assist the appropriation of desired tracts of land for the recreational desires of elites. “(Weiner, 1992: 400)

Using conservation as a class weapon in the modern globalized world, with the same asymmetry of power, brings an international dimension:

«[...] international environmental organizations generally operate under the impression that forests are a ‘global’ resource. By suggesting that species deemed of scientific or economic value must be protected, the 1973 US Endangered Species Act has legislated the rights of US citizens to manage forests outside the boundaries of the United States; this legislation grants Western conservationists the moral authority to intervene in the land management of other countries on behalf of ‘science’” (Harper, 2006: 93)

Although we are discussing protecting nature here, the problem can be associated with any particular phenomenon designated as heritage, which is also a crucial element of one's daily life. Nearly every attempt of conservation from 'above', without participation and taking into account the wishes and needs of local communities, very quickly degrades into such a patronizing attitude. Unfortunately, the local practice has plenty of such examples.

Conservation of the group identity?

In contrast, within the populist discourse of national and other identities, protected areas are often represented as heirloom and an issue of national pride. Talking about the historical aspects of the landscape, in the introduction to the almanac *Landscape, Memory and History*, Pamela J. Stewart and Andrew Strathern say that "[...] such elements have always the potential to be reborn as 'heritage' and tied in with national sentiments. Everything depends on how 'the heart' sees them as 'inner landscape'" (Stewart and Strathern, 2003: 9).

It can be quite positive - I personally prefer a national identity built on respect for our own cultural roots and environment to one that is built on exclusion and opposition to others. However, like any other ideological discourse, it is subject to being abused. Few people know that "on July 26, 1935, the National Socialist regime passed into law the world's most comprehensive and stringent piece of nature protection legislation for its time" (Lekan, 1999: 384). The rhetoric behind it is touching: "Over and over again the love for plants and the landscape bursts forth from our blood, and the harder we try and the more seriously we search for reason, the more we must come to realize that the feeling we have towards a harmonic landscape and that the feeling of being related to the plants belongs to biological laws innate in our being" (Weiner, 1992: 388). However, the ideological basis of this act was firmly rooted in the Nazi idea of *blood and soil*. Weiner makes the point concerning the quoted Nazi official Wiekking-Jurgensman in this way: "Too bad the Nazi nature guards could not produce the same sense of connection with other members of the human race." (Weiner, 1992: 388).

The natural and cultural heritage and are still frequently invoked as supporting elements of the chauvinist ideology mythos, which is present in the Croatian media and political everyday life too, for example, in the verses of a popular singer.

Sustainable Development?

Stewart and Strathern also notice the pragmatic aspects of thinking about landscape heritage: "Heritage' comes into play when the card of 'development' has already been played." (2003: 11). Places proposed for preservation can often thank for their preservation precisely the fact they had been left alone by developmental trends present in the wider society. Thus, "heritage" can become a development perspective where the mainstream economy failed. As an employee of the park I was inclined to this

perspective in the process of carrying out my work. However, in operational terms this approach rests on and takes into account the previous two – the comfort on which we base such a development is exactly the narratives about the “preservation of an irreplaceable resource,” as well as those of the “roots and national identity.”

A little bit of self-analysis

Performing the duties of a scientific assistant for cultural heritage in the Učka Nature Park Public Institution, my fundamental task, as described in my contract, was performing inventory, conservation, research, evaluation and presentation of the various manifestations of heritage that can be found in the park. In this paper, this task could be described as reading social memories stored in this landscape and their interpretation, reaffirmation and retransmission meeting the criteria of the previously described agenda. I felt very comfortable in this role for several reasons. First, I thought it was relevant. In words of Boštjan Kravanja:

«[...] what are the crucial cultural elements that shape [...] the identity [of the protected area]? I think we have to produce a holistic body of knowledge about this. First, we need knowledge about the very creation of a place from the beginning of its relationship with human beings, followed by the knowledge of particular historical changes that resulted from relationships i with others. Only with this kind of information can we understand the status of the area today, and recognize ways in which this status can be fostered, maintained and protected in the future. “(Kravanja, 2006: 51)

Secondly, I have no ambition to elevate myself above these discourses as an “objective” expert - technocrat. If I used some of the narratives mentioned above in my work, I did it honestly, trying to use what I considered constructive elements of both. I hope that my awareness of the traps mentioned above enabled me to largely avoid them in my work. In response to these challenges, Weiner says, “We must cultivate the taste of demythologization, making ourselves more self-confident. We have to become aware of our needs and our choice of values and assume responsibility for them as *individual* preferences.” (Quote)

Of course, the problem lies not only in my individual preferences. I am still only one of the employees of the Park, an institution that as part of the state administration in Croatia has its own strategy and those smaller, daily political goals, which largely determine whether and for what purpose the results of my work are used. Kravanja says:

“On one hand, the role of anthropology in protected areas is to reveal different senses of places in their historical and comparative points of view, as can be described by people who live in the areas in question and by different authorities that left traces of their presence there. On the other hand, the more anthropologists advance their ethnographical engagement, the more involved they are in changing political contexts and as expert representatives of decision makers, meaning that they become authorities them-selves. “(Kravanja, 2006: 51)

By presenting these initial thoughts, notes and disassociations, I would like to acquaint you with the results of my “interpretation.” I’m presenting them to you as an example of attempts to collect what Kravanja called “a complete set of knowledge” about a location. In some form, they are woven into most of the activities of the park - from educational programs for schools, facilities for visitors and web pages (<http://www.pp-ucka.hr>) to management documentation that should be the basis for its management in the future.

II. Reading of the historic landscape

Memories of a time immemorial

We might start from the ground - the natural landscape. In a way, even the geological media is saturated with social memory. Compared to the shrines which serve the establishment of the social memory of the events from the scriptures that no living member of the community testified, mountain cliffs recall stories from textbooks about the origin of limestone on the seabed, and to the movement of tectonic plates, the erosive effect of time. If you take in hand a local stone laced with tiny fossilized remains, you suddenly recall the pictures of ammonites, dinosaurs and other living creatures from the books, that in reality no human eye has ever seen.

The human story of this area actually begins at the end of the last ice age about 12,000 years ago. It was almost unrecognizable then: for the water trapped in the ice caps covered much of the northern hemisphere, the level of the inner seas, like the Mediterranean, was up to 120 meters lower. All up to the line of Zadar the Adriatic seabed was a broad plain of steppe character, a rich hunting ground where animals like mammoths and bison ran about. Istria was not a peninsula but an elevated part of the land, and Učka was an inaccessible mountain far from the shore and covered with thick forests of northern pine. From this point onwards, climate got warmer and the rise of the sea level that followed swallowed the North Adriatic plain (Forenbaher, 1996: 213).

Following these events, these mountains become more interesting as a man’s seasonal residence, as evidenced by archaeological sites such as Pupičina cave which a small community encompassing thirty generations of hunter-gatherers used as a seasonal residence, following the movement of their prey.

Social visions of these ancient times were mostly relatively recently recreated by science, but the present landscape is the cause of continuity of some practices continuing to the present time. Flint tools and the remains of campsites at the site Lokve on Čičarija provides evidence that the location where wild animals gathered for water was often visited by paleolithic hunters, and we will still find hunting lookout towers there - a perfect hunting ground remains a perfect hunting ground.

Establishing traditions

The next stage of human evolution sets a permanent and unquestionable continuity that reaches all the way to today in this region. First farmers came to mountainous parts of Istria 7500 years ago and introduced the Stone Age in this area. Their arrival marks the first major human intervention into the landscape. To feed their cattle they set fire to the dense woods and create open pastures. The landscape begins to change due to human activities and the general climate into the one we know today. The mountain pastures of the first shepherds are now, when the continuity of the management of this landscape has been seriously challenged for the first time, beginning to turn to pine forests and shrub. A network of ponds and troughs was built on the local permeable karst, which is also today being slowly abandoned to mud and vegetation.

Shortly after the livestock agriculture arrived in some areas below the mountain range, pockets of land were released from stone, the stone walls are raised, first permanent settlements were created.

Despite numerous changes in the ethnic composition and language that took place during human migrations and conquests, management and the way of life, dictated by climate, landscape and the very nature of animals and plant species that were grown, has not drastically changed from its original Neolithic state (Forenbaher, 1996:215). Sheep and people spent the winter in the surrounding plains, while in the summer, as the grass in the lower ground dried, they went up the mountain to the customary grazing and seasonal settlements. Crops which preferred cooler air were grown on a mountainous plateau while the valley eventually settled on the typical Mediterranean cultivars of wheat, grapes and olives.

Initially, the sheep and goats were kept primarily for their meat, but there are pottery and bones from the Neolithic layer in Pupičina cave that indicate that the local shepherds quickly mastered the processing of milk. A large number of pottery vessels that were used in milking, and a disproportionately large number of bones of young animals eaten indicates that the husbandry was intended to preserve as much milk for consumption and processing.

Now that this millennial continuity dies, one of the main sources for the reconstruction of its form comes from the names planted in the local landscape. Strathern and Stewart sum up the following observations in their editorial:

“[...] an important aspect of how landscapes gain their meanings has to do with naming. The names of locations within areas record the forms of human experience that have occurred within them. [...] area is exhaustively divided into small locality names identified with garden spots, pathways, past battle sites and other locales where events make up a maze of local history.” (Stewart and Strathern, 2003: 6)

Today we are often faced with numerous and repeated toponyms which we observe in the midst of a dense forest which signify the not so distant intensive use of space. Sinožet signifies cutting hay, Lanišće place where flax was grown, Močila sites which

this same flax and hemp were soaked to get rid of their fibers. Fornaze are usually found near the sites of clay harvesting and indicate the places where furnaces for ceramics were raised. The names of today hardly recognizable ruins of mountain dwellings indicate which settlements or families below the mountain they belonged to. Numerous Križišća (crossings), Korita, Pojila (troughs), Lokve (ponds) and Lazi indicate to us the arrangements of life that took place once (Ivetac, 2002: 253-276).

The projection of power in the countryside

Names planted in the landscape today keep a barely visible memorial to the next layer of human history applied to it, the first of the “authorities who have left their mark here” (Kravanja, 2006: 51). After establishing the patterns of the Neolithic landscape management in the metal age patterns of behavior and social organization were set that left their mark in the landscape at the points which serve as a kind of a projection of power of the new social order.

Newly discovered metals due to their strengths and plasticity allowed the development of various new forms of tools and weapons, which led to the additional development of agriculture, but also a strengthening of military power. The production of bronze encouraged the development of trade throughout Europe at the time - tin and copper that make this metal alloy are very rarely found on the same site, and the supply of these raw materials often required trade with distant regions. Due to advances in agriculture, agricultural societies began to produce surpluses of food sufficient to sustain strata of the population who were not engaged in its production, but were specialized warriors, rulers or priests. From the previous simple human societies the first local kingdoms rose and tribal alliances that left their mark in the landscape by construction of a large number of hill forts that were used to control trade routes, or as a refuge for the population during the period of frequent warfare. In the area Učka and Čićarija 25 such sites are listed that are now, at best, completely unrecognizable piles of stones on the forest floor to the layman's eye. However, it is interesting that almost every single one of these hills carries a significant name among the local population - Gradac, Gradišće, Knezgrad, Boligrad, Stražica etc. With many of them stories are related about the mythical rulers and conflicts. “[...] Such names may also provide a kind of archaeology of meanings, recording aspects of history that may otherwise be forgotten, or environmental features that are no longer there.” (Stewart and Strathern, 2003: 6)

Roman peace

In the second century B.C. Roman legions conquered the small Illyrian kingdom in Istria and Kvarner and thus the areas around Učka and Čićarija got introduced into the full mainstay of ancient culture and written history. In the long period of peace that followed, many small Illyrian villages became Roman urban centers, and new were established.

It is significant that the *Roman peace* in the mountainous Istria left very few material traces, and those that are less tangible which are the focus of this paper. For a society that has long enjoyed the security and abundance that was brought by the Roman state and military apparatus, the mountain was only a place of summer pasture or marginal agricultural land. Human life flourished in the fertile valleys and cities that spread openly and confidently, safe from threats, near the center of the world's largest empire at that time. This cycle of colonization and abandonment of the mountain would be repeated several times throughout history.

Thus, the Roman rule affected the landscape of Učka and Čićarija mainly indirectly. Through it two roads were built for the purpose of linking Italy with the eastern provinces: Via Flavia, which, linking Pola and Tarsatica, crossed the Podol pass above Kožljak and Via Secondaria, which via the pass Poklon connected the Liburnia with the cities in the mainstream Italy. A county road now occupies the place of the latter.

In the 5th century this period of peace was in its last throes. Acceleration of the collapse of the empire resulted in a series of barbarian invasions and the ravages which made life in the coastal region uncertain, and the mountains again got the importance of being a refuge and sanctuary, and with time a place of residence. Then again, as places of refuge, caves were inhabited like the complex Oporovine above Medveja, fortifications and shelters were built, and positions of the old ruins were reestablished into smaller urban centers that will grow into medieval communes, such as Mošćenice and Veprinac.

The myth of the landscape

Slavs, as one of the last folk groups that came to this area in the sequence of events, encountered an indigenous Roman Christian population. Dominance of the Slavic language of the newcomers was slowly established, but also of the Christian religion and the Mediterranean way of life of indigenous people. However, it is this period of transition that has left extremely interesting clues in the local toponymy which, demonstrating the power of their names, which came to us after centuries of history provoking the questioning of our own origins and cultural roots.

The hill Perun, which hangs over the Mošćenice and Potoške vale canyon, has long attracted the attention by the fact that its name evokes the name of the ancient Slavic god of thunder. It proved to be a valuable stimulus for a more detailed research and field research identified fifteen toponyms whose names and spatial interrelationships strongly suggest the holy meaning of the places relating to life cycles: summer and winter, sowing and harvest, birth and death (Katičić, 2006; Belaj 2006).

Despite the security with which we can say that the landscape played a significant role in the spiritual life of the Slavic immigrants, it is in its interpretation that we rely on a series of concurring coincidences, rather than on concrete evidence. The philological work on which the reconstruction of the Slavic mythical text relies to interpret these places is one of those tasks that will hardly ever be finished and complete. However,

the mobilization of science which was spurred by the favorable *zeitgeist* around the scenery and some toponyms represents living testimony of the ability of loci to retain and evoke social memories.

Feudal ordering of space

In the 10th century Učka and Ćićarija ranges marked the boundary between the Croatian Kingdom and the Frankish Empire, and later through the turbulent history this area was the subject of demarcation and fighting of many states and the feudal landlords who have succeeded one another in the territory of Istria and Liburnia. The memory of this period remains solidified in fortifications and castles, mostly in the ideal places that had previously been used for the construction of hill forts. With its stabilization, this feudal system established its own *pedagogy of the landscape* (Lofgren, 1999: 5) based on manors that were units of defense and taxation. To this day, on the sides of the old paths a number of marked stones can be found which divided the former feudal estates. Feudal laws, such as the Lupoglav one, give us an interesting insight into the contemporary language for the description of the landscape. In the absence of the coordinate system and the precise size, the location and boundaries are based on the importance of microlocations important for the local tradition of life - many of which are still quite recognizable.

“[The land] is bordered by Roč, a Venice field. Next to the the two boundary stones marked with a cross between which a large oak tree stands. Move right towards the church of St. Clement where there is also a cross carved in the wall of the church. Venetians have painted it with lime. Then, to the far right side in orientation from the same church, through the woods to the big oak tree marked with the cross, to Hum, which is also a Venetian castle. Now, down to the valley, beside the old road to Pazin, down from this path by a beech forward to Lesiščina, Pazin and Boljun border. Then to the remote border to Brest, right to the hill called Planik that there on the right side borders with those of Veprinac, and on the other side with those of the Rašpor. At the end of the Br-gudac forest, down towards karst, forward to Semić and again to the said border stones in the valley. “(Juričić-Čargo, 2001: 30)

At the end of the Middle Ages, the 15th century, the Vlach population which would later become known as Ćići, or Istroromanians migrated into the mountainous parts of Istria ravaged by the plague. Bringing with them their particular language, their own shepherd tradition and beliefs they significantly contribute to the development of the local culture and way of life. A number of local pastoral toponyms and village names originated from the Istroromanian language.

The highlight of the cultural landscape

In the period that followed the Middle Ages to the modern times, the traditional culture and way of life of Učka and Čičarija attained their final forms. Potatoes and corn came from the American continent, two plants that would win a significant role in the mountain agriculture and nutrition of the local population. Travel writers passing through this region, like Johann Weikhard Valvasor, noted that on the slopes Učka “a lot of vineyards lie and their grapes are full of good wine, and for local residents he said, “ quite a few of them sustain themselves with other fruits, such as chestnuts, which are very large and thick which they also export to distant countries, since whole forests of these chestnuts grow here (Valvasor, 1970: 90).

It was the time of greatest population density on both Učka and Čičarija. Villages had up to 600 inhabitants and were filled with lively economic activity, the landscape and its resources were optimally used, and the local mountain pastures served around 30,000 sheep.

The Age of Enlightenment was marked by objects of public architecture such as the fountain next to the road in the village of Velika Učka which supplied water to passengers on the road between Pazin and Kastav, the earlier Roman *Via Secundaria*. Interesting is the discrepancy between the community and social memory carved and the inscription above the pipe. While locals have always called it Napoleon’s water, there is clearly, in Latin, an engraved text: “Voyager [...] in respect for the divine Emperor Joseph II [...] the only Emperor.

It is an interesting story connected with the name of the highest pass on this road. Believers from Istria, who paid pilgrimage to the Marian shrine in Trsat have traveled over this pass for centuries, which offers a beautiful view of the Bay of Kvarner. There, seeing it in the distance for the first time, they would pay respect to the church of Our Lady of Trsat. When the fall of Austro-Hungary established the border on the Rječina, pilgrims from Istria would come this far and here bow and pray to the Virgin, because they were not allowed to cross the border (Dmitrović, 2010). For this act of popular devotion, this pass is named Poklon (Bow), which combines the importance of the landscape and physical practice (Connerton, 1989: 72-105) for the maintenance of social memory.

Memorials of escape and resistance

Mountains Učka and Čičarija were natural places to organize guerrilla resistance during World War II. As a memorial to this resistance and its price, in the village Brgudac about fifteen memorials are located, from those which commemorate the first meetings of the People’s Liberation Committee to the central monuments, which list the 19 killed fighters and 37 civilian victims of German reprisals before the end of the war.

The text of the exhibition in the local memorial house illustrates how the steady pattern of the mountain became a place of refuge again: “After the tragedy they suffered

on June 7, the people of Brgudac left the village for some time. Bringing the most necessary things, taking the cattle they went into the forest at the foot of planik. Men would stand guard, and women would work the field. “

There are few villages and hamlets in the mountainous Istria that do not carry at least one plaque which recalls the burning and persecution in the spring of 1944 committed by the German army in its last attempts at breaking the resistance of local population. However, interesting is the amount of commemorative of facilities at the sites where almost nobody goes. In many remote areas of forest roads and intersections there are small plaques that commemorate the places where some combatants have fallen or where an inaugural meeting of a partisan unit was held. As the central node of this system of memories stored in the landscape, there are larger sculptural interventions, such as the pyramids at the intersection of two forest roads under the hill Lisina. The lichen covered text carved into its stone surface used unusually tough wording such as “righteous hatred” and “revenge.”

In his two papers dealing with the relationship between landscape and social memory in Istria, Jonas Frykman tackles the problems of the Croatian general treatment of the people’s liberation war monuments in the period after the eclipse of the regime that set them up:

“The monuments are not the same as remembrances. Usually they remain part of everyday life, something that we will pass by on our way to work. But under which circumstances do they come to life? The war of the 1990s provided an answer to this question, because many half-forgotten partisan monuments all over Croatia got a different sparkle. What has been part of rural life for decades suddenly became clear and full of meaning, reminding everyone about an injustice long repressed. (Frykman 2002: 51)

But Istria was a special case, heretere has not been any vandalization; people here have been schooled in living with a mythological history, a past to which they can relate relatively freely. (Frykman 2002: 58).

I think that the mountainous area of Istria is specific on the issue as a unit within the Istrian peninsula. The post-WWII era of peace, urbanization and industrialization changed attitude to landscape again. Due to the general abandonment of this area its monuments were no longer found on anyone’s daily way to work. By the nineties, most of the surrounding population stood by as they were left to fall into oblivion and plant overgrowth. Some vandal act or would either have passed unnoticed or would be somewhat counterproductive, inhaling a new symbolic life into a forgotten monument at least for a moment and bringing attention back to it.

Having lost the meaning of refuge and shelter, this area again sank into oblivion and ignorance. Throughout history, in the foothills of the mountains the Empire and the states followed one another that cared little about it, seeing it as a possible obstacle or point of demarcation, a no-man’s land, an outlaw shelter. Učka and Čićarija have never been the subject of conflict and claims that revolved around Istria. Usually we won’t

hear that the Istrian esuli lament the loss of these “badlands” in which Čići and shepherds live. And the partisans who were on the mountain had a base and shelter did not fight for it, but for the country at its foot. After the fight and escape, even they left the mountain, like a memory of the hard and bad part of life. These were the memories that they had to pay homage to with plaques and then turn forward and move on - a new life was waiting down the broad fields, in cities and factories.

History does not end

“Identity which you people are looking for is not a question of who you are, but where you are and how you are doing on this poor earth.”

Inhabitant of Motovun (Frykman, 2004: 48)

The early 20th century introduced changes in social and economic circumstances that increasingly encouraged the abandonment of traditional ways of life and movement of the population to the valleys or the cities. It is a process that the destruction of war that was mentioned only accelerated, which brings us to today - the deserted villages and shepherds’ dwellings. This change affects not only the human communities and culture. The end of multimillennial continuity of sheep husbandry on Učka and Čićarija led to drastic changes in the landscape. Pastures change into shrub and pine trees, are taken over by a wild young forest, the ponds are jammed with mud and plantlife, a great landscape and biological richness disappears. But there’s been a series of phenomena that suggest a kind of inversion.

The first reminds us that history never really ends. In a pattern that does have at least one historical precedent in this area the Čići, the area abandoned by population is taken over by prišlići (newcomers). Učka has been inhabited for several decades by a lively community of Albanian shepherds originating in Macedonia, who are slowly expanding their range of landscape management. It is interesting that, coming here, they kept their life and the details of their shepherding tradition, but the end product of their work was adapted to the local market here as they used the local recipe for making cheese that they themselves proudly call “Učkarski cheese”. Through the diktat of the landscape, from the native inhabitants they have inherited a number of practices and places associated with the grazing and keeping of their animals thereby becoming the authentic heirs of thousands of years of continuity of livestock in this area, “The durability and versatility of this ancient way of life confronted with new physical, social and economic circumstances, is interesting as from the perspective of personal existence, also from the perspective of the millennial tradition of livestock husbandry. It provides an insight into how are nomadic herders and way of life rooted in the local landscape survived through the millennia of previous changes.” (Frangš, 2010).

Furthermore, in the era that threatened its disruption, the continuity of social practices and memories becomes a valuable commodity in the sense of economy and identity. One of the reasons why Učkarski cheese and other traditional products experience a

kind of market boom stems from the fact that they were not without reason part of the tradition of local life. These are quality and nutritional products, obtained through sustainable economic practices affecting the character of the local landscape. In addition, their purchase and consumption brings with it a sense of rootedness and belonging - social memory in the most direct sense of the word.

Conclusion

Frykman discusses the processes that take place in Istria in his paper, where the physical facilities and ambience have become a major source of identity for official local policies (2002: 50). The establishment of protected areas is presented to us as a marker of “the spirit of the times”, which have in addition to their conservation role the task of being a kind of identity “theme parks” dedicated to “conservation” and transfer of the social ambience and the associated memories. The area of the Učka Nature Park is separated as a kind of monument or museum, a space defined by a social memory of an imagined period in the past which was characterized by a more harmonious relationship with nature, a place that should serve as a source of continuity in today’s world of rapid and uncertain change. It is an interesting endeavor for which I find no historical precedent, that lies as a new layer on top of all the earlier strata of information stored in the landscape described in the text - as their interpreter and a selfproclaimed key.

So this era, in a somewhat desperate attempt to patch the broken fibres of its own sense of continuity and connection with the past, leaves the detailed interpretation of the previous era in the form of metal plates and various other interpretative visitor infrastructure as its material traces on the mountain. As one of the participants, I am truly interested in the outcome of this experiment, which traces will this narrative leave to future generations, being so far the most ambitious attempt to store memories in a landscape. However, to accomplish its role of a connector that bridges the gap in the continuity of development, it is necessary to go a step further than the sheet metal panels when talking about the past. It should ensure the continuity of social, economic and personal meaning to the last surviving offspring.

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