

## PERCEPTION OF LAND AMONG SLOVENIANS IN THE CONTEXT OF LANDSCAPE CHANGES IN SLOVENIAN ISTRIA [ISTRA]

Mimi URBANC, Ljubljana\*

with 1 Fig. and 2 Tab. in the text

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### *Zusammenfassung*

*Die Wahrnehmung von Land bei den Slowenen im Kontext der landschaftlichen Veränderungen im slowenischen Teil Istriens*

*Diese Arbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Wahrnehmung von Land (insbesondere kultiviertem Land) durch die slowenische Bevölkerung in Istrien [Istra]. Sie erforscht die Mechanismen des Verstehens, Begreifens, Bewertens des Begriffs Land und damit verbundene Modifikationen im Kontext der landschaftlichen Veränderungen im 20. Jh. Der empirische Teil, der die Prozesse der Grounded Theory (Gegenstandsverankerte Theoriebildung) verfolgt, wurde mit der Software ATLAS.ti durchgeführt. Das Ergebnis einer Analyse von 147 Fach- und allgemeinen Texten förderte mehrere miteinander verbundene Aspekte von Land zutage, die die unterschiedliche soziale Wahrnehmung von Land und seiner Dynamik verdeutlichen und zugleich die enge Verflechtung materieller und immaterieller Elemente sowie die zugrunde liegenden Prozesse aufzeigen.*

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\* Mimi URBANC, PhD, Scientific Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Novi trg 2, SI-1000 Ljubljana, Slovenia; e-mail: mimi@zrc-sazu.si, <http://www.zrc-sazu.si>

### *Summary*

*This paper deals with the perception of land (in particular, agricultural land) among the Slovenian population in Istria [Istra]. It studies the mechanisms of understanding, comprehending, and evaluating the notion of land and changes connected with it in the context of landscape changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The empirical section, which traces the processes of grounded theory, was carried out using ATLAS.ti software. The result of an analysis of 147 specialized and general texts yielded several mutually coordinated and connected aspects of the land that reveal a diverse social conception of the land and land dynamics, and that express the close interconnectedness of material and intangible elements, as well as their underlying processes.*

## **1 Introduction**

The link between man and land is one of the oldest in human history, because it is directly involved in human development and its relationship towards the living environment. This complex relationship – and landscape as one of the results – has been studied by a variety of disciplines (SWANWICK 2009, p. S62). Lately, as perception has gained universal interest in studies by various disciplines, the comprehension and understanding of land have enabled deep insight into this complex and complicated relationship.

The understanding of land, landscape, and the processes connected with both is a key element of understanding this relationship. It enables more thoughtful planning and measures to suit the local population. Future development should go beyond the long-established comprehension of land and glorification of traditional cultural landscapes, and should consider the living and functional relationship between an individual, society, and physical space (PENKO SEIDL 2008, p. 35). This would lead to a higher quality of the living environment, which is also the goal of the European Landscape Convention (Internet 1).

The key questions of this paper are the meaning of land to people, the connection between land and landscape, and how the comprehension of both notions has been influenced by societal factors triggered by political, economic, and social changes.

The study on which this paper is based on was carried out in Slovenian Istria [Istra]. This region has experienced a turbulent past, with many changes that also influenced people's attitude towards the land and how they understand it. Rapid changes of governments and the economic measures connected with this played a significant role. Istria is well in line with distinctive landscape changes that occurred in Central and Eastern Europe on extensive scale as stated by many papers (SCHARR & GEITNER 2008, PALANG et al. 2006, URBANC et al. 2004).

## 2 An analytical framework

At first glance, the term *land* seems to be completely clear and unambiguous. In reality, very few expressions are as distinguished or burdened by such a broad meaning as the term *land*. However, it denotes a full spectrum of different meaning, starting from ground and soil, property, arable land, land under permanent cultivation, permanent meadow and pastures, and, finally, a nation or country. The English expression *land* can be translated into Slovenian as *zemlja* 'soil', *kopno* 'mainland', *dežela* 'country', *posestvo* 'estate', *zemljišče* 'ground', *površina* 'surface', or *polje* 'field'. In Slovenian, *zemlja* as the most typical translation of *land* also means Earth, the Earth's surface, the solid layer just beneath the Earth's surface, soil, the part of the area that is considered to have economic value, the mainland, the planet as a human living place, country, and state (SLOVENSKA AKADEMIJA ZNANOSTI IN UMETNOSTI, ZNANSTVENORAZISKOVALNI CENTER & INŠTITUT ZA SLOVENSKI JEZIK FRANA RAMOVŠA 1994). This shows that both Slovenian and English have a considerable semantic jumble and that the English expression has moved away from its etymological base, which denoted "the plot of ground or the furrows in a field that were annually rotated" (JACKSON 1986, p. 66).

Landscape, however, is a cultural construct created when people view the land: "Land becomes landscape when seen by man, revealing the record of his activities on the surface of the earth and his relationship with his environment. The perception of landscape reveals his attitude towards it and generates emotions ranging from distrust and fear to reassurance and delight. These may arise from the view of a real landscape or from the imagery of poet, painter or writer" (HUNTER 1985, p. 1). Later CRESSWELL (2004, p. 11) framed his idea in a laconic statement: "We do not live in landscapes – we look at them."

This intellectual reasoning is somehow detached from the more tangible meaning of landscapes. In everyday use in some languages, the term "landscape" is very often understood as a portion of earth or land (PALANG et al. 2006, p. 348). Such an understanding is also proven by the origin of the term *land* in the Germanic languages. The English word *landscape* and German *Landschaft* (Danish *landskab*, Dutch *landschap*) combine two words, the first being *land*. The term denotes both the place and the people living in it, and *scape* or *schaffen* means "to form" (SPIRN 1998, p. 16). However, in some other languages (including Slovenian), there is no etymological affinity between the notions *zemlja* 'land' and *pokrajina* 'landscape'. Nonetheless, the notion of *pokrajina* 'landscape; province; region' is not unambiguous in Slovenian, because the standard Slovenian dictionary (SLOVENSKA AKADEMIJA ZNANOSTI IN UMETNOSTI, ZNANSTVENORAZISKOVALNI CENTER & INŠTITUT ZA SLOVENSKI JEZIK FRANA RAMOVŠA 1995, p. 894) provides three meanings: (1) "A smaller or larger territory defined by shape, overgrowth, organization . . . mountainous ~, tropical ~ . . . a defined smaller or larger territory . . . Lower Carniola." (2) "A painting presenting a ~." (3) "Literary . . . interesting mental ~; legal Socialist Autonomous ~ of Kosovo; religious church ~; urban planning cultivated ~."

In addition, Slovenian has two terms for 'landscape' – the older one (*pokrajina*) is used by geographers, and the younger one (*krajina*) is used by landscape architects. This creates confusion in everyday communication and in cooperation between profes-

sionals from different backgrounds, leading to almost insurmountable terminological dead-ends. For geographers, the term *landscape* is understood as a demarcated and relatively homogeneous part of the Earth's surface, as the complex of interrelated landscape elements, or as a technical term, whereas the term *krajina* is used to characterize the external image, appearance, impression, or picture of a landscape or as an artistic term (PENKO SEIDL 2008, p. 35). Thus, for example, geographers use the term *pokrajina*, whereas landscape architects use the term *krajina*, even though they mean the same thing by the two expressions (KLADNIK, PERKO & URBANC 2009, p. 82).

The reduction of the notion of landscape to a form of representation (CRESWELL 2004, p. 11, HUNTER 1985) was clearly denied by OLWIG (2004, p. 48). OLWIG raises the question of the interrelationship between representation and what is represented. According to him, the "particular form of representation can shape the landscape represented, and the landscape thus represented can shape its representation" (OLWIG 2004, p. 42). For instance, landscapes described in a book or on paper impact the "real" landscape and vice versa. He refers to this relationship as a self-referential circulating reference, with the final stage of this link in which the distinction between representation and that which is represented is lost (OLWIG 2004, p. 42).

The "real" landscape is closely connected to land cultivation; it is a product of *culture*. The Latin term *colere*, from which it originates, means to cultivate, tend, or guard (JONES 2003, p. 41). It is thus linked to the human skill of cultivating the land and thus changing the natural landscape. However, this implies a certain dichotomy between nature and humanity, which is challenged by INGOLD, who suggests that landscape is ingrained in humans (INGOLD 2000, p. 11).

The landscape is best felt by those involved in shaping it. In the case of an agricultural landscape, this pertains to farmers because they work on the land and cultivate it, and this cultivated land is the most important element in a landscape. While cultivating the land, a very close relationship develops between them and the physical environment. The farmers used their energy to reshape the natural environment into a cultural landscape and impress upon it their wants, desires, and needs. In this process land played a vital role and – laden with material and mental meanings – was therefore the basis for a landscape. Land and landscape are so deeply connected and intertwined that sometimes it is difficult to differentiate between both notions, as is the case in Slovenian Istria.

Land, or one's attachment to it, is thus connected to the issue of belonging and identity. This is why it is necessary to know how one understands land in everyday use, because it played a key role in everyday life. Up until the Industrial Revolution, it was basically the only means of survival, and it played a very important role even later. Until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, agriculture was still the main activity of the majority of the population. The close dependence on land for everyday survival in the past created a strong emotional attachment to it. This article does not deal with the state of fertile land and changes connected with it, but rather with people's attitudes towards land in the sense of cultivated or agricultural land.

Land is not understood merely as a material entity, but primarily as a social and cultural phenomenon. We focus on perceptions of land through time, as they were

recorded in various written sources: literary, technical, and scientific. The common factor in all of the written sources used is that they are based on memory. In psychology, memory is an individual's ability to save, store, and then recall information. This article deals with memory connected to land, the landscape, and the living environment of individuals and social groups. This is a memory of a way of life and its practices, a memory of the landscape's elements, especially land, and mankind's attitude towards them, a memory of events past, of which the two world wars and the changes following them are the most important.

We are interested in the personal attitude towards events in the past that shaped mankind's attitude towards the land where they lived. APPLETON (1996) showed that the behavior of human society (which impacts land use changes and creates changes in a landscape) is not directly affected by the environment, but by the human relationship to the environment – not as it is, but as man deems it ought to be. In other words, it is the image (or notion) of the environment that is important. In this sense, it is important to study not only the physical changes to land and the landscape, but also people's relationship to such changes. Of interest is how people represent land and how they perceive it – and this not as a static reality, but as a process. In the broadest sense of the term, land is in the centre of a continuous relationship between people and space.

### 3 Study area: Slovenian Istria, a land in the crosswinds

Slovenian Istria extends over the coastal zone (46 km) and the immediately adjacent low hills in the northern part of the Istrian Peninsula. Thanks to its position at the junction of the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and Central Europe, Istria has an exceptionally heterogeneous culture, history, and politics. Throughout its history, various ethnic groups, economic systems, and social classes met and mixed here, as did three distinct languages: the ruling class spoke German and Italian, and the general population spoke Slovenian and Croatian.

The Slovenian part of Istria is geographically and mentally the only indisputably Mediterranean part of Slovenia (STAUT, KOVAČIČ & OGRIN 2007, p. 116) and covers slightly more than 300 km<sup>2</sup>, only ten percent of the entire peninsula. Among the natural features of Slovenian Istria, the relief and the climate are the most distinct. The relief is a result of the close alternation of flysch and limestone bedrock and the low elevation (up to 400 m) near the sea (REPOLUSK 1996, pp. 36–38; REPOLUSK 2001, pp. 268–270). The climate is Mediterranean, enabling the production of a variety of Mediterranean crops. Slovenian Istria is a fairly new regional concept, dating back to the end of World War II, when Slovenia became a federal republic of Yugoslavia.

Before the Second World War, ethnic division was connected with spatial distinction. The ruling class, which was Italian-speaking (and in Trieste partly German-speaking), lived in the coastal cities Koper/Capodistria, Izola/Isola, and Piran/Pirano, whereas the hilly countryside was populated by small farmers mostly of Slovenian origin. Despite social, economic, and intellectual differences, there was a strong connec-



Fig. 1: The Istrian Peninsula lies at the northeast end of the Adriatic Sea at the junction of the Balkans, the Mediterranean, and Central Europe. It has had a tumultuous and vibrant history due to frequent border changes.

tion between the farmers in the hilly countryside and the townspeople in the coastal cities. These cities, Trieste in particular, enabled the rural people to make a living. Agriculture was oriented toward supplying Trieste, which also offered jobs outside agriculture, and the issue of agricultural decline was therefore not so pressing. After the emancipation of the serfs, agrarian overpopulation reached its peak. With the beginning of industrialization at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a class of part-time farmers began to develop, who produced wine and vegetables for Trieste and simultaneously sought part-time seasonal work there. The interwar period was marked by ethnic, economic, ideological, and linguistic pressures that resulted in economic stagnation, the collapse of farms, and emigration (URBANC 2007, p. 83).

The Second World War and postwar period finally ended in 1954, when the border between the two occupation zones became a state border. Trieste, the region's former center, fell on the Italian side of the closed border, and Koper/Capodistria assumed

the role of a new regional center. This fact changed everyday life because it broke centuries-long ties and spatial, economic, and social connections that only began returning to their old paths in the 1960s, with the loosening of border restrictions and the rapid colonization of all three Slovenian coastal cities with people from other parts of Slovenia and from other Yugoslav republics. Cities experienced intense population and economic development with the stimulation of industry, freight traffic, and tourism. On the other hand, the hilly countryside faced a different destiny (ČEDE & FLECK et al. 2007). In spite of an almost unchanged ethnic structure, traditional activities were in rapid decline. Farmers were attracted to the factories, which appeared to guarantee a better life. In addition, there was a negative perception of agriculture, which was considered an ideological enemy of socialism. The result was obvious in the empty villages and abandoned agricultural land, especially in more remote areas (URBANC 2007, pp. 83–84).

The new period started in 1991, when the administrative border with Croatia became a national border. At the local level, a variety of problems arose connected to social and spatial connections. The people most affected included those in ethnically mixed marriages because of the problems of their national (un)affiliation, landowners with property in both countries, those with relatives across the border, employees working abroad, Croats using Slovene health care and education institutions and so on (KLEMENČIĆ 2001, p. 19; PIPAN 2007, p. 228). The tangible result was that people emigrated from the area and arable land was left uncultivated. The new Slovenian-Croatian border raised the problem of people living in four disputed hamlets along the lower reaches of the Dragonja River (PIPAN 2008, p. 342). However, the physical boundary was minor compared with the mental one constructed by decision-makers and politicians, which caused constant tension between Slovenia and Croatia, not to mention the lack of certainty over the exact course of the border (KLEMENČIĆ 2001, p. 20; KLADNIK & PIPAN 2008, pp. 62, 73–78).

Independence was soon followed by economic changes. Due to structural changes and the loss of the Yugoslav market, Slovenian industry fell into deep crisis. It lost its appeal and strength at all levels. Increasing unemployment and the abolition of some administrative limitations targeting farming stimulated people to resume traditional agricultural practices. This trend was emphasized by a modern lifestyle with characteristic settlement patterns, eating habits, and leisure activities. The first element is linked to suburbanization, the second is based on the attraction of the Mediterranean diet, and the last is linked to traditions, homeliness, and pristine diversity, which turned out to be very valuable within Slovenian society. Istria has become a very popular area for day and weekend visits from other parts of Slovenia as well as from Italy, and for buying old stone houses and transforming them into vacation properties. The direct impact of this is the renovation of old houses, the spread of vineyards and olive groves, and a new differentiation of space based on proximity to the coastline or to major traffic routes and convenient access roads. The hilly countryside is acquiring a twofold character: The areas closest to the coast are vital and flourishing, whereas the more remote areas are continuing the trend of social and economic decline (URBANC 2007, pp. 84–86).

#### 4 Methods and approach

The term *land* and the attitude towards it was analyzed with the help of texts. It is important to stress, however, that texts are not understood in the traditional linguistic sense that sees them as a separate subject of study, but in a sociological sense that sees texts as a window into the world of human experience (RYAN & BERNARD 2000, p. 769). Text is not merely a cultural product. It is also a place in society where two processes simultaneously take place: the representation of the world, and social interaction – this is why texts have many functions. We are interested in their communicative value which is mostly dependent on the situation or context in which a text is created, and the situation in which the addressee receives it (DUNCAN 2001, p. 825).

The main idea behind text analysis is that communication takes place using language in a written, spoken, and metaphorical form. This means that it is possible to spread ideas among various individuals and social groups due to the existence of texts that reveal meaning using special combinations of words, sounds, and images that can have a particular meaning in a particular social and cultural environment (HUBBARD & KITCHIN et al. 2002, p. 124). Critical discussion and interpretation of all kinds of texts reveal a partial, simple, and distorted conception of people and the environment. Texts are a medium that illuminates a mutual relationship between society and space; in other words, they reveal the mysterious nature of mankind's interaction with the environment. This is especially true of fiction, which is increasingly frequently becoming the subject of text analysis. It is important to note, however, that the boundary between fictional and "factual" texts has been blurred. Regardless of their nature, texts are filled with meanings that people use in navigating through the modern world (CRANG 1998, p. 44). Text analysis gained importance with the realization that our postmodern culture is "governed" by notions and images (URBANC 2008, p. 128).

The most important aspect of qualitative methods is that society and the world are seen as something dynamic and changing, constantly being shaped through the common effect of cultural, economic, social, and political processes. The emphasis is on life experiences and the reaction to them, and on the interpretation of the understanding and common meanings of mankind's everyday social world and reality (Dwyer & Limb 2001, p. 6). The life of the individual has been marked by political change, ideology, and resulting economic changes that have most directly affected the individual. This is why personal stories are a good study source; they are based on experience and memory that live and are shaped in the real world. Memories and life stories offer a key to understanding social processes through time (LEDINEK LOZEJ & ROGELJA 2000, p. 14).

The selected texts were analysed according to the procedures of *grounded theory*, also known as inductive theory (COPE 2005, GLASER 2007, CORBIN & STRAUSS 2008). This is a research method used to develop a theory that is based on collected and analysed data. It is especially suitable for studying complex phenomena, which land and landscape certainly are, by constantly searching for and studying the links between concepts found in the data. It seeks to discover something new and develop a theory and so it can be understood as a method and a theory at the same time (MESEC 1998, p. 34). It is based on constant linking and the combination of gathering and analysing data.



The main criterion of text selection was the inclusion of a spatial component and a certain level of connection to the field of research. The next substantive criterion was that the discussion be about land, landscape, and their changes and influences on people's lives. We looked for the texts using the Cobiss bibliographic system and a web browser. The keywords searched for were: *Istra* 'Istria', *Istrani* 'Istrians', *s(S)lovenska Istra* 'Slovenian Istria', *Primorje* 'Littoral', *Primorci* 'Littoral residents', *Koprsko primorje* 'Koper Littoral', *Koprsko* 'Koper region', *o(O)bala* 'coast', *Šavrinija* 'Šavrin Hills', and derivatives. In addition, we systematically checked the following journals and collections relating to Slovenian Istria: *Primorska srečanja*, *Annales*, *Acta Histriae*, *Brazde s trmuna*, and *Istrske teme*.

The selection and entry of texts into electronic format took place at the same time as coding. This simultaneity is important because, in line with the procedures of grounded theory, theory is created on an ongoing basis, whereby awareness of the need for additional texts is created.

In the past, the only tools in this kind of analysis were scissors, a photocopier, and a pile of blank paper. In recent times, a number of computer programs have become available that facilitate and accelerate the mechanical aspect without affecting flexibility. This study used the ATLAS program to analyse 147 texts comprising a total of 3,344 pages or 6,189,564 characters. The basic unit of analysis is a concept or a notion that originates from the conceptualisation of data and not from the data itself. These concepts (over 1,000 were coded) were gathered into groups that were then sorted into content categories that reveal various aspects of the term *land*.

Genre of text	Number of units	Number of pages	Number of characters
Novel	19	899	1,498,740
Essay	23	74	208,784
Poem collection	10	114	46,103
Author/biography	1	7	15,120
Popular text	39	391	813,954
Academic text	44	1,817	3,501,476
Memoirs	11	34	105,387

Table 1: Genres of texts

The understanding of land and landscape differs between the people that are outsiders, or "external observers," and insiders, or "involved observers." Insiders live and work in a given territory and therefore have daily contact with the land and the daily mental flux between themselves and the landscape, whereas outsiders lack direct contact with the land and experience the landscape more sporadically. External observers see the landscape from a critical distance and have a different perspective on something that the internal observers may take as self-evident. Most of the texts analysed in our study were written by insiders, and only academic texts were produced by outsiders, although some of the authors originate from Slovenian Istria.

To gain insight into the original text, some extracts from them have been included. The author most cited is Alferija BRŽAN, born in 1946 in Sveti Anton/San Antonio near Koper/Capodistria. He has a degree in Slavic studies and has been a Slovenian instructor for many years at the school of economics and business in Koper/Capodistria. He has published two collections of poetry: *Čista voda* (BRŽAN 1997) and *Ud kapca du murja* (BRŽAN 2002). His poetry is emblematic for creating poetry about Istrians.

## 5 Results: representations of land

### 5.1 Land as a part of the natural environment

Land was people's closest connection to the natural environment, because it allowed them to make a living during the two world wars. Poverty generated either an indirect or a direct connection between survival strategies and the natural environment. Due to the fragmentation of property, agrarian overpopulation, and poor natural conditions, land merely enabled a meager existence; even this demanded hard work, and so the concept of drudgery appears frequently. This refers not only to tilling farmland, but also to the acquisition of new land and cultivation. If the situation in the countryside is understood in light of all social and economic conditions, one can determine that land was intensively tilled in the interwar period. This is not intensiveness in today's meaning of the word, but intensiveness in the sense of the maximal use of land in which a large portion of land is tilled, and not only the best portion. Hard work caused an increase in cultivated land in comparison to uncultivated land. Texts especially stress pastures, particularly in childhood. Pastures not only provided children with first-rate entertainment and numerous opportunities for play, but also an opportunity for establishing genuine connections with the natural environment. In those times, children explored nature and penetrated its mysteries.

Working on the land is connected with the term *natural disaster*. The literature analysed included many records of these, especially regarding the frost of 1929 and its consequences, which included a decline in olive-tree growing, the failure of oil mills, greater poverty, the decline of cultivated terraces where olive groves stood, and a short-lived increase in charcoal-burning due to an increased quantity of olive wood. In addition to the natural disasters already mentioned, drought is also mentioned, connected with harvest and the drinking-water supply. The memory of natural disasters was preserved in the social sphere for a long time, and it has therefore become part of social memory (KOMAC 2009, p. 206).

The literature analysed includes relatively few concepts dealing with adjustment strategies. As expected, everyone relied on farming as the means for exploiting natural resources and as a way of life in the countryside. People had to use various land-improvement measures, such as terrace construction, rock picking, and the use of rocks for the construction of dry stone walls. There is a special intercorrelation between terrace construction and land cultivation; the latter was the cause for the first, but then terraces influenced the people's work and lives through cultivation practices and through drought and erosion prevention (AŽMAN MOMIRSKI & KLADNIK

2009, p. 18). Interestingly, erosion was rarely mentioned despite the fact that it is quite pronounced in Istria (ZORN 2009a, 2009b). Terrace construction and cultivated terraces as a tangible consequence of these measures, as well as dry stone walls, have formed the characteristic image of the Mediterranean cultural landscape.

In the period after the Second World War, survival was no longer as closely connected to the natural environment. Immediately after the Second World War, farming was still significant for making a living; however, since the mid-1950s its role has gradually decreased with the development of other practices. A distancing from nature and the changed relationship between people and nature have caused changes in the natural environment. In this period, a predominant term is *overgrowth*, which is a result of a combination of the natural, economic, and social changes of the time. The issue is the connection of people and nature. Due to migration, depopulation, and the abandonment of farming, cultivated land was beginning to be overgrown with grass and thorn bushes, and pastures with shrubbery and forests of little value. Terrain with a northern exposure was hardest hit by overgrowth and in fact forests are prevailing (HRVATIN, PERKO & PETEK 2006, p. 72). The shrinkage of cultivated land also caused the decline of cultural terraces, which was not something new – this began after the great frost of 1929 and the frost of 1956, which primarily affected olive-oil producers. The economic and demographic changes already mentioned exacerbated this process. Northern slopes again were hit first and hardest. In the postwar period, natural disasters were first mentioned as a consequence of inappropriate human intervention into nature. The collective farms and the policies of that time allowed greater changes to be made in the structure of land use, which sometimes proved inappropriate.

This period also experienced extensive measures connected to postwar ideology. The first measure was cultivation, which surpassed its prewar level when the acquisition of new land depended on the individual and was a part of the individual's living strategies. After the war, it became a part of the state strategy, which caused it to occur on a large scale. This period was also characterized by people's conviction that the development of science and technology would enable them to control nature and exercise complete supremacy over it. This is confirmed by the fact that new vineyards also appeared on north-facing slopes.

The period after the Second World War was primarily characterized by a rapid abandonment of agriculture, which was the economic activity most connected to the natural environment. There are thus fewer concepts connected to agriculture and survival strategies than in the previous period. A livelihood dependent on agriculture was still at the forefront, especially right after the war. Modesty was still a distinguishing quality and a survival strategy for Istrians.

During this period, the first and only reference to suitable soil for a particular grapevine variety appears, which is surprising considering the significance of viticulture. This reference speaks about the fact that only older people have proper knowledge regarding the suitability of particular grape varieties for certain kinds of soil, and mentions that some have consciously planted unsuitable varieties. The postwar period and progress were not inclined towards considering ancient wisdom and knowledge. This period includes the first major agricultural engineering measures. Land consolidation was carried out, and in the 1970s and 1980s irrigation and drainage were used in the karst countryside of Istria.

Istrians see themselves as a product of the natural environment in which they live. Just as Istria is special, so are the Istrians, because they existed in interdependence and honed themselves against one another: “He is unassuming, unnoticed and patient, yet strong. He is just as the land that he works, chides, and blesses has made him, shaped by dry summers, mild breezes and storms, years of deprivation and hunger, and happiness and well-being. Just like his land, his beautiful Istria” (ŠTOK-VOJSKA 2003, p. 163).

What are the qualities of an Istrian? Modesty, stubbornness, resilience, and resourcefulness. All of these originate from the land in which they live, and reflect the relationship they have towards it. Modesty refers to the consumption of resources produced. Istrians were modest by dint of circumstances, and their stubbornness connects them with the donkey, an animal that was frequent and important in Istria until the Second World War. Resilience was a result of their turbulent past, numerous changes, and alternating rulers. Yet the people remained. Resilience is also the ability to resist natural conditions. The literature mentions two elements of nature that are synonymous with this natural resistance of Istrians: oak trees and rock. Just like oak trees, Istrians are rooted deeply in the land and can resist all natural disasters, and they are solid as a rock.

## 5.2 Land as a value

In the interwar period, land belonged to the highest category of values and, as such, was a part of the emotional, mental, and intimate life of Istrians. The most important role, however, was played by ownership. Land determined the social and material standing of individuals in society, but was not in itself sufficient; it needed to be wisely managed. Cultivated land was the result of long, hard work; it was connected to drudgery, an already mentioned term that occupies an important place in the memories of Istrians. The memory of cultivated land is, therefore, a memory of picking rocks and putting them into dry stone walls, and terrace construction. Thus, it is not surprising that the idea of “winning” land from nature appears. Land was always the first topic of conversation and, due to the lack of alternatives, cultivating it was the way to make a living. This is why land is primarily ascribed economic values – it provided safety and enabled survival. Even in times of crisis, land, and especially fields, was something tangible that one could cash in at any moment and thus survive the worst. Therefore, survival is one of the most frequently noted concepts that are closely related to fertile land.

Because it was so highly regarded in society, land also acquired a series of negative connotations, especially among those people that could not idealize it due to their material conditions. Smallholders that were making ends meet often considered their land dry and meager.

Land, or land ownership, had a crucial impact on the material and social standing of individuals in Istrian society, primarily connected to inheritance. Istria had a “masculine” egalitarian hereditary system. This equality included only men or sons and excluded women or daughters. Sons usually received equal portions in kind, and daughters received dowries. The result of this kind of inheritance were “extended”

families. To prevent the farm from being divided, all of the men remained at home and cultivated the land together.

It was because land was so significant for survival and social classification that political and economic measures in ownership relations and conditions in agriculture could shake the foundations of farmers' position. In the interwar period, Italian economic and tax policies were directed against Slovenian farmers; their basic purpose was to financially weaken Slovenian farmers and then purchase their properties at a low price. The worsening of the situation was exacerbated by the economic decline of Trieste and the resulting loss of market, and the drop of the price of agricultural commodities.

The period after the Second World War was characterized by a rapid and thorough change in the value system. Right after the war, prewar patterns were still present but they began falling apart rather quickly. Immediately after the war, land still occupied an honored position on the scale of values, and the significance of fertile land was once again emphasized. It became evident how people were attached to their land, when they began leaving their homes after the war. It was saying goodbye to the land that was the most difficult. Attachment to land and ownership of fertile land were the basis of a new class of citizens, part-time farmers. These people had a farmer mentality but they did not own enough land to earn a decent living. Therefore they found additional employment in industry. It was imperative that their working hours still allow them to work on their farms in the afternoon. In this way, land kept its prewar status. It was a source of strength and energy.

Soon after the situation after the Second World War had normalized people's value system began changing as well as their attitude towards land. This occurred together with general social and economic changes. Prewar practices were discontinued by politically motivated administrative measures that severed ownership relations. The most important was, of course, nationalization; this also affected smallholders, because common land, known as a *komunela* in Istria, was taken over by the state. The most well-known common is Vrh Briča, which used to be owned by the Koštabona-Puče farming association. Its situation remains to be resolved. Indeterminate ownership (owners that left the country decades ago, an incomplete denationalization process, etc.) is otherwise a serious problem in Istria and is connected with its tragic and only partly resolved past issues. Because the ownership of some houses is unknown or the owners live abroad, there are difficulties in carrying out communal and other arrangements in certain places.

The boosting of non-agricultural activities and the perception of industrialization as the only and fastest path to progress neglected agriculture and redefined values. Land as the central link with this area lost its primacy among members of younger

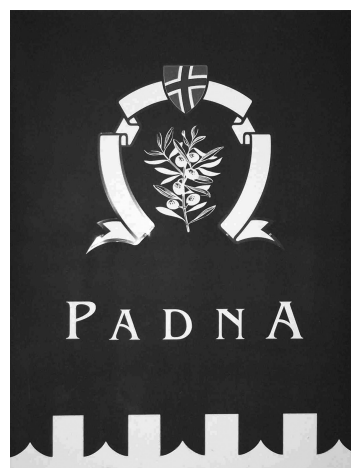


Fig. 2: Along with the grapevine, the olive tree is one of the strongest and most frequently seen symbols of Slovene Istria and olive oil is a popular and valued product for sale (Photo: Denis GOJA)

generations that earned a living doing other things. Economic development was only possible by changing arable land into residential area. Farmers as land owners and private producers became an insignificant if not unwanted part of the social structure. The abandonment of agriculture changed the attitude towards land. Land that was most appreciated in the past was still appreciated; however, not for food production and making a living, but as residential areas. The sale of land for vacation homes or residential houses was much more profitable than cultivating it. Former farming settlements became bedroom communities inhabited by people that worked in towns. Farmers were no longer the ones that protected agricultural land due to production principles. This caused a shift from concentrated population to dispersed population.

An especially serious issue is property ownership on both sides of the border, which was a consequence of the new border. Bureaucratic obstacles in border crossing were largely responsible for the abandonment of land cultivation. This issue was especially serious on the Slovenian-Croatian border following Slovenia's independence. There are references to people using longer routes to reach their parcels on the other side of the border because they were not permitted to use shortest routes between the parcels. This caused loss of time and greater production expenses. This is one of the reasons for the abandonment of land cultivation on the opposite sides of the Slovenian-Croatian border.

### 5.3 Land creates affiliation

Affiliation comprises two concepts: sense of place and attachment. Both are based on special qualitative elements of the landscape with the land being a very important point. On the map of Istrians' attachment, land kept them alive and strongly connected them to Istria. Rusticity was so deeply rooted that land became synonymous with Istria. Just like land, Istria also offers a great deal of opportunities: "Our Istria, still unexploited and virgin land" (KOCJANČIČ 1998, p. 14). Rusticity was also deeply rooted with intellectuals that no longer live here, but whose memories from childhood and youth connect them to land. Land became an overwhelming concept comprising the most intimate notions: home, family, the village where someone lives (or lived), the memory of childhood and one's ancestors; it is the energy flowing from one generation to the next. This is why it is a key concept in the Istrians' world of perception. Work on the land is the bridge between individuals and their homes, between family and the land where they live. Attachment remained even after the Second World War among those that remained. It enabled the creation of a class of part-time farmers and played a crucial role in the conservation of the cultural landscape. It remained until modern times.

The sense of place is shaped through a biographic relationship that encompasses personal history in connection with a place. In this relationship, the place is an integral part of personal history, and so it is a long-term relationship in which cognitive, physical, and emotional attachments are intertwined (CROSS 2001). The biographical relationship is built on memories, creativity, pride of ownership, the connection with the living environment, and experiences. The information stored in the minds of Istrians and connected with their attitude towards this area is information about poverty,

cultivated land, suffering, celebration, goodness, drudgery, and ancestors. The memory of ancestors emphasizes the time component of the attitude towards Istria. Not only the area, but also the people that live in it, work, (re)shape it, and are eternal. Generations change but the attitude, knowledge, and awareness are passed from generation to generation. This ensures continuity and stability in the area.

*My grandpa  
tilled his land here,  
did your grandpa,  
great-grandpa?  
Yes,  
my grandpa also  
dug and ploughed here ...* (BRŽAN 2001, p. 160)

The memory of ancestors is inseparably connected to the memory of life:

*Rivers of steps of our mothers,  
rivers of steps of our grandmas,  
rivers of steps to your heart, land ...* (BRŽAN 1997, p. 38)

The above excerpts from poems refer to the concept of cultivated land. Istrian land is fertile if enough work is invested in it. Effort and creativity invested in working the land and the “byproducts” of this process are the most important tangible elements of the cultural landscape. Istrians are proud of the work of their ancestors and are saddened when they see the efforts of past generations changing into toppled stone walls and overgrown terraces; on the other hand, the needs of modern times destroy fertile land, cultivated through the sweat of the brow. The biographical attitude is also shaped through pride of ownership, which has been mentioned many times. Ownership of land plays a significant role, if not the most important role in the formation of an attitude towards a place. It also functioned as a hindrance in postwar migrations, as clearly expressed in the following interview: “That I should flee to Italy! At home, I had a small farm, a few head of cattle, and I did not need to go into the world and become someone else’s servant ... I preferred to stay home where I belonged ...” (KOCJANČIČ & ROJAC 2003, p. 113).

The sense of place is also formed through an ideological attitude that was formed on the basis of historical memory and experience; this is why the fear of invaders and the need for the proper treatment of local land is always present:

*Do you see  
these hills,  
these valleys,  
this world?  
My child,  
to buy these places,  
this land,  
no one should have,  
no one  
and never,*

*enough money to buy any field,  
or any piece of land ...* (BRŽAN 2001, p. 160)

It is clearly stated here that *they* (i.e., foreigners) should not have the opportunity or the possibility to buy Istrian land. This is land that was cultivated by Slovenians, by their ancestors, and therefore belongs to Istrians. This ideological attitude is based on uniqueness that originates from the uniqueness and beauty of Istria. The beauty of the area is largely in cultivated land that reflects the efforts of past and present generations. Respect for the achievements of previous generations and the land is the primary source of survival on the farm (KERBLER 2010, p. 37). This is why many people cannot reconcile with modern trends, especially the abandonment of land cultivation and subsequent overgrowth. To them, the land is not overgrown and wild; quite the contrary, it is cultivated and mild, and so is the landscape. The mildness of the landscape is the result of human labor and activities in this area. Human inactivity will only create wilderness and alienation. Land affects lifestyle, which is additionally affected by knowledge and values. The lifestyles of individuals and society, which encompass food, ways of cultivating the land, crops, gender roles, and a number of other elements, are important.

Topophilia also depends on people's social and economic standing. TUAN (1990, p. 97) states that love of place changes according to the social and economic standings of farmers. This cannot be confirmed on the basis of the texts analysed because there are no data on the state of farmers; however, some conclusions may still be drawn. If the coded concepts connected to land are reviewed first, it can be seen that there are fewer concepts with a negative connotation, and they occur less frequently than concepts with a positive connotation. The analysis of concepts with a negative connotation yielded the following results: A negative attitude is connected to hard work; only one quote clearly states that hard work is connected to land cultivation. There is a clearer connection between hard work and poor land. Hatred towards land is explicitly stated in quotations about *žrnadarji* 'day workers'.

If one is familiar with the situation in agriculture, and if the significance of land in the minds of Istrians and the role of land in the formation of material and social conditions in the countryside are taken into account, it is not surprising that a negative attitude towards land is connected to land ownership. Land was cruel and hostile towards farmers and smallholders, who barely made a living despite hard work. In both cases, it is a love-hate relationship. Their wages were low. The only source of pride was physical strength and the ability to dig deep with a hoe; this is how they made their mark on the land.

#### **5.4 Land generates alienation**

The relationship between ideology and tradition encompasses two concepts: the ruin of farms and the promotion of unsuitable crops. The previous chapter presented a (probable) connection between social and economic standings of individuals and their attitude towards land. Bearing this in mind, it is clear that the ruin of farms contrib-



uted to the sense of alienation. With independent farmers becoming renters of their own land, or agricultural proletarians, their attitude towards land changed. The pride of ownership, which is so important in shaping the sense of belonging, was replaced by bitterness due to failure, and anger at the system as the thing to blame for this difficult position. The promotion of unsuitable crops also received similar reactions, especially the promotion of wheat instead of grapevines, which had held the top spot in farmers' conceptual world.

The period between 1945 and 1991 brought new challenges to the relationship between man and land. Cultivation value of land was replaced by real-estate value causing century old elements falling apart. This gave older generations a sense of loss or alienation. The world they knew and were familiar with was disappearing. Neatly cultivated land and terraces with dry stone walls were making way for new activities and the needs of modern times, roads, and other infrastructure. This alienation was not merely connected to the spread of built-up areas, but also with changes in farming areas:

*When I was a child, pastures were well taken care of, and carefully enclosed by walls. People even competed to see who would have the nicest pasture. Now, livestock no longer grazes and the pastures are abandoned and overgrown. The walls are also gone for the most part. Stones were taken away when people built their houses, roads, and paths. There are no shepherds or livestock ...* (FRANCA 1995, p. 90)

In addition to this overgrowth and construction, alienation also results from pollution, scattered settlement, and the people that live in the area.

*I see parceled out  
golden land . . .  
I see an abundance of blackberries  
and garbage  
I see that all the springs are blocked,  
and I see houses,  
houses  
that are not villages . . .  
And I do not hear a word  
that offers some warmth,  
some strength ...* (BRŽAN 2001, p. 158)

A different concept, the dividing border, refers to the border between Yugoslavia and Italy. It cut through farmland, causing people to own land on both sides. People had many problems due to the physical separation of their cultivated land. The border also cut through established routes, and thus cut the Istrian countryside off from its main trading center, Trieste. Trieste was separated from the territories belonging to Yugoslavia by two borders for people living in Zone B of the Julian March [Venezia Giuglia], and later with one border in Zone B of the Free Territory of Trieste [Territorio libero di Trieste/Svobodno tržiško ozemlje/Slobodni teritorij Trsta]. Crossing the border was only possible with a permit.

After the war, the previous free passage and purchase became supervised. This was understood as a violation of personal freedom; as a violation of a self-evident right.

Therefore the border was not merely a physical dividing line; it was connected with violence experienced by those that nonetheless wanted to cross the border. Even after the division of the Free Territory of Trieste and the establishment of a border between Yugoslavia and Italy, crossing the border was connected with humiliation and abuse (BRŽAN 2001, p. 110).

## 6 Discussion and conclusion

Taking into account the fact that the majority of Slovenians living in what is today the Slovenian part of Istria were highly dependent on the land and its cultivation, it is no wonder that the notion of land is the most obvious in establishing the relation between people and their environment. The text analysis yielded four different aspects that cover all the variety in how the notion of land has been ingrained into human perception. Scholarly and research texts revealed the material layer of understanding, whereas literary texts exposed an intangible, immaterial layer of understanding. This is connected with the very nature of both main genres because literary text is connected with freer expression, whereas scholarly texts are expected to be more standard.

Table 2 shows the differences in understanding the concept of *land* in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The analysis of the understanding of the concept of *land* indicates the great semantic diversity of the concept itself. This breadth completely corresponds to the definition of the concept provided in the introduction. The attitude towards fertile land is especially stressed. Research on fertile land is especially important, because Slovenia is facing a rapid conversion of the best agricultural land into construction sites. In just a few years the part-time farming system, which ensured that the land was treated responsibly and carefully, and was the best assurance for safeguarding it, has collapsed. The change in the social system, social and economic shocks, and a completely different value system are generating a new, different relationship to the land, which is increasingly losing its formerly very important role. The land is increasingly being understood as capital, as a material good, and its moral value and the feelings that it generated have receded into the background. The term *fertile land* encompasses two concepts that the discipline divides: agricultural land and cultivated land. Cultivated land is a cultivation category that produces field crops, vegetables, and grass. This includes fields, orchards, vineyards, and meadows (KLADNIK, LOVRENČAK & OROŽEN ADAMIČ 2005, p. 254). In addition to cultivated land, agricultural land also includes pastures (KLADNIK, LOVRENČAK & OROŽEN ADAMIČ 2005, p. 175). The analysis of the texts does not distinguish these. Land appears as an all-encompassing concept that defines the relationship of the individual vis-à-vis the living environment. At the same time, the concept of *land* serves as a central concept that expresses not only the relationship to the present, but especially the relationship to the past.

The past is more idealized with greater distance. Many of the texts analysed describe the rural past or the relationship to it. The trend of historicism in Istria has been present for decades, although it seems that it especially flourished after Slovenia attained independence. The perspective on the past also changes as distance increases.

Neutral meaning		Negative connotation		Positive connotation	
Idea	No. of quotes/no. of links with other concepts	Idea	No. of quotes/no. of links with other concepts	Idea	No. of quotes/no. of links with other concepts
land	27/46	poor	2/3	dear	2/2
ambivalence	5/1	hard work	12/6	mother	1/2
cultivation	4/12	bitter	1/1	mild	1/2
no man's	1/3	of the devil	2/1	strength	5/4
resale	1/2	nationalisation	7/6	ancestral	1/2
available	1/2	uncultivated	2/2	attachment	29/15
red, Istrian	1/2	cursed	1/2	fertile	15/9
loss of significance	1/3	poor	1/1	salvation	6/2
		enemy	5/4	independence	1/1
		dry	2/3	sacred	2/3
		sad	1/1	safety	2/3
				guarding	1/0
				shelter	1/1
Total	41/71		36/29		67/46

Table 2: The perception of the notion *land*.

Istrians have always yearned for their former authorities and their former state, even though it had many shortcomings and they were more dissatisfied than satisfied with it. In addition, certain concepts have mellowed with distance. Poverty is very often highlighted, but it seems to be something that cannot or could not damage the relationship between people and the land unlike in some studies in which poverty is stated as an exclusion mechanism (KOCH 2008). The past is pure and immaculate, just as the land is pure, immaculate and worthy.

Due to the almost supernatural and personified characteristics ascribed to it, the land became the most important element in idealization of the landscape. The attitude toward the landscape was materialized through attitudes and perception of the land. In many ideal Istrian landscape types, the land holds a prominent position. Most people considered a beautiful landscape to be a terraced landscape, crisscrossed with dry stone walls, neat pastures, and productive vineyards and orchards. Beauty is a result of human endeavors on the land: "Lines of dry walls, grapevines, gnarled olive trees, and slender cypresses gave a mystical image to the landscape ..." (FRANČIČ 1993, p. 44).

Many Slovenian rhetorical figures used to describe landscapes are directly connected with the land, its cultivation, and land-use types: vineyards of noble vines, tender olive groves, almond flowers, and a snow of flowers. These all reflect a longing for an ideal

landscape as a result of hard work with and on the land, which in many cases is lost due to land abandonment, forest and shrub overgrowth, and urbanization processes. It seems that OLWIG's (2004, p. 42) idea about self-referential circulating reference does not fit into our case study. The land and landscape representations in texts do not correspond to reality (decay of terraces, abandonment of land, and overgrowth), which is mostly viewed negatively. In the case of Slovenian Istria, there is a gap between landscape representations and what is being represented. The latter, especially if we focus on agricultural land, is most directly and indirectly influenced by the economic and population situation as a whole and the situation in agriculture. Because most people in Istria no longer make their livings by farming, they have developed a very idealized image of their region.

Individuals' understanding of any phenomenon is the result or consequence of their personal view and the cultural environment they come from. They select and distort all information with regard to their personality and world view. Their image of the land and the landscape is selective; it may be very close to reality or very removed from it. We expect to find the most distorted images during the interwar period and in the role of fascist ideology. The creators of the Communist system presented this in its worst light to fuel and incite a sense of affiliation and agreement.

The feeling of belonging to a landscape – which in Istria is based on land to a great deal – to which people ascribe cultural and historical value and consider a living environment for their families and local communities assures us that people will not only be concerned for their own good, but also for the landscape itself (URBANC et al. 2004, p. 120, FELBER RUFER, WASTL-WALTER & BAUER 2007). The study of attitudes towards the land and the landscape and application of the results in development programs will enable the balanced development of the living environment and ensure its stability. There is room for improvement in Slovenian geography in this area, because it has only started being recognized that people's opinions matter.

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