

## MULTICULTURALISM AS A GLOBALIZING CHALLENGE TO LOCAL CULTURAL IDENTITIES AND HERITAGES

**Abstract.** *The article proceeds from two theses: that the protection of local cultural identities and heritages as a method for maintaining and even enhancing local (and also national) cohesion in the face of globalizing challenges is sensible and justified only under the condition that the cultural heritage is constructed on the basis of multiculturalism, and the intertwinement and interaction between diverse various local lifeworlds; and that (re)constructed local (territorial) cultures and identities cannot be completely captured by binary and oversimplified definitions of old and new localisms. Both of these theoretical premises are with the help of structured and semi-structured interviews applied to a case study of the cultural, potentially economic, political, and social transformation of specific local, territorial, and cultural identities in the town of Idrija, Slovenia, as a geographically remote and delineated "hill" town with a specific cultural, natural, and technical (industrial) tradition and heritage. The value of its very specific heritage was recognized by its successful inscription in 2012 to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites as an example of institutional and symbolic global proximity and presence.*

**Keywords:** *culture, globalization, local identity, multiculturalism, heritage*

### Introduction

How do territorial diversities, traditions, local differences, specific cultural heritages, and collective identities respond to the intensification of globalizing processes? Are these identities disappearing or are they growing stronger and sharper? Are their dynamics vacillating or are they entirely indifferent to these globalizing processes? All of these responses are possible, though none are necessary. Perhaps the more relevant question is how large is the impact

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of global flows on the transformation and alteration of these collective identities? In this regard, it is important to take into account that global flows, processes, and influences, despite their complexity and multidirectionality, and the fact that they often appear amorphous, decentered, spontaneous, and even unconscious, have their own specific point of departure from which they emerged. To capture the complex interaction and mutual interdependence of global forces and local lifeworlds (which, in reality, are not separate entities and may never have been) only seems possible through the study of individual cases, which is how we will tackle the question of the multiculturalism of local cultural identities and heritages in this article. We will start with the problematization of the concept of monocultural local (and also ethnic and national) identities, and how they are protected and promoted in various forms and with various purposes (such as cultural tourism, the commercialization of cultural traditions and heritages, the monolithic and homogeneous quality of specific local lifeworlds or ethnicities respectively with the purpose of creating a “patriotic” foundation for local or ethnic cohesion, etc.). We will also highlight the advantages and indeed the necessity of emphasizing multicultural local identities and heritages on the basis of cultural pluralism in both the past and the present. In this regard, globalizing processes can be the means of deconstructing mythological assumptions about monoculturally defined local, ethnic, and national identities, and the “uniform” cultural heritages and traditions according to which they define themselves. At the same time, globalizing processes act as an inducement to deconstruct the assumption that old localisms are “autochthonous”, indigenous, self-sufficient, and exclusivist local lifeworlds. To summarize, this article will proceed from the thesis that the protection of local cultural identities and heritages as a method for maintaining and even enhancing local (and also national) cohesion in the face of globalizing challenges is sensible and justified only under the condition that the cultural heritage does not reflect the monolithic and monocultural vision of one (majority/dominant) local (national) lifeworld, but “many cultures in one” (Karim, 1997), that is to say local identities and worlds that are constructed on the basis of multiculturalism or cultural pluralism respectively, and the intertwinement and interaction between diverse various local (national) lifeworlds.

We will first discuss the research question in the wider context of the post-classical concept of culture and tradition, and the concurrent problematization of one of its supposedly key constituent elements: namely, “autochthony”, which, primarily because of its monocultural or emphatically exclusivist nature, calls for critical reflection, and possibly for rejection, not only in the face of globalizing processes as a part of contemporary time-space condensation, but also in the longer historical perspective. We will then proceed to make the argument that (re)constructed local (territorial)

cultures and identities, despite their inherent connection to a specific physical (actual or imagined) space, which is always simultaneously symbolic and imaginary, cannot be completely captured by binary and oversimplified definitions of old and new localisms, in which the former is original, unreflecting, necessary, natural, closed, and self-sufficient, and the latter is voluntary, conscious, deliberate (rational) (Strassoldo, 2004), and both open to and linked with the wider world. In the second part of the article, both of these theoretical premises will be applied to a case study of the cultural, potentially economic, political, and social transformation of specific local, territorial, and cultural identities in the town of Idrija, Slovenia. Idrija is a geographically remote and delineated “hill” town with a specific cultural, natural, and technical (industrial) tradition and heritage.<sup>1</sup> The value of its very specific heritage was recognized by its successful inscription in 2012 to the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites as an example of institutional and symbolic global proximity and presence. In addition, Idrija is also the headquarters of Kolektor, a transnational company that links almost thirty enterprises with its global production and marketing presence on strategic world markets. One of the main questions is to what extent can this geographically remote town with its cultural and economic presence in global markets and its strong tradition of a capable, selective, and critical attitude toward the past, tradition, and heritage use these qualities as a foundation for the reconstruction of its contemporary local identity. Further, what impact does the institutionalized global frame have on this identity from the standpoint of the town’s global symbolic presence reflected in both its inclusion on UNESCO and the company Kolektor. In terms of methodology, we will try to answer these questions with the help of structured and semi-structured interviews with individuals who are either directly or indirectly involved in fields related to Idrija’s cultural heritage.

### The Post-classical Concept of Culture, and the Globalizing Challenges to Cultural “Autochthony”

A half century after Raymond Williams provided a social definition of culture in his epochal work *Culture and Society: 1780–1950* (1958), which became one of the classical approaches to the understanding of this otherwise illusive concept,<sup>2</sup> the need – at least within cultural studies circles and

<sup>1</sup> The term “hill” town is used in this article for the Slovenian term “*rovt*”, which indicates the specific region around Idrija in Slovenia, and at the same time is a general term for a parochial backwater.

<sup>2</sup> Culture is a historical process in which a personal subjectivity and a whole or particular way of life play the key role. As such culture contributes to the human creativeness of its own history through the arts (high and popular), institutions, practices, identities and values of different social groups, rituals, behavior and ways of lived experiences, i.e. the plurality of cultural traditions (Williams, 1960).

also to a certain extent within sociology and anthropology – for new thinking about contemporary (post-classical) approaches to the study of culture, especially in the aspect that understands culture as a particular way of life, seems almost inevitable. For Williams, culture as a collective or specific way of life is always placed within flexible, but nevertheless recognizable borders. It is therefore located within a specific place. Put another way, it is the expression of a space, a place, a city, and at the same time a constituent part of it. To the extent that culture is a collective way of life (and it is often understood that way), its borders are generally defined by ethnic or national borders. It is precisely globalizing processes, “radical compressions of time and space” to use the succinct definition that many scholars do (Rizman, 2008: 68), that are calling into question the very idea of culture as a collective way of life physically located within specific borders. We are not claiming here that globalization has permanently disrupted the connection between national culture and the territorial borders of a nation state, but rather that the connection has been loosened, and, as Rudi Rizman points out, this may not necessarily be detrimental to national culture and identity (Rizman, 2008: 66).

The multidirectionality of global cultural, as well as economic, social, political, and other flows and connections, redefines the locality as a socially constructed environment that is associated with identities and is emotionally charged, and also causes it to confront a new set of situations that shift cultural formations. It thus creates a sort of cultural chaos to the extent that people are aware of all these flows and connections, and has resulted in the global production of the local and the local production of the global (Robertson, 1995). On the one hand, nation states and territorially determined identities (national, ethnic, and local) are transnationally destabilized. On the other hand, and not independent of the latter process, assumptions about the “autochthony/authenticity” of individual cultures and identities have become more problematic, especially when these are defined by cultural practices, traditions, and values understood as exclusively local, indigenous, untainted, original, natural, pristine, etc. But there is no such thing as an “untainted” cultural source and there hasn’t been for a very long time (or perhaps ever). There is no cultural source that has not been “contaminated” by other cultural practices, values, and identities. Even in the past, cultures did not exist in a “pure” and “original” condition, but were constantly exposed to internal and external influences, some of which were violent such as colonization and colonialism (Melikian in Wong, 2005: 57).

Multicultural overlapping and intertwinement became only more intense with the emergence of the consumer capitalist way of life, mass tourism, contemporary migration, electronic communication, etc. In the

processes of globalization, therefore, cultures are simultaneously dependant and independent variables. With this definition, we avoid the erroneous “mechanistic” dilemma about whether culture is only an active or only a passive determinant of globalization. All of these phenomena have contributed to the delocation of local cultures and identities as well as to their relocation (Rizman, 2008). Because of this, we can no longer accept the model of culture as a locally delimited collective way of life (cultures and identities as “roots” or as “islands”), nor can we satisfactorily define cultures by their difference from the rest of the world. They must also be understood (if not predominantly) with the metaphor of movement, mobility, and travel (cultures and identities as paths, “routes”, or crossroads). At the same time, it is precisely globalizing processes that continue to undermine the stability, “authenticity”,<sup>3</sup> “autochthony”,<sup>4</sup> and “purity” of locally delimited cultural traditions<sup>5</sup> and heritages<sup>6</sup>. Cultural tradition and heritage, in the larger sense, must no longer be understood as static, territorially embedded, and spatially determined (metaphors of system, order, and permanence). Rather, they must be understood as syncretic, dynamic, and hybrid products of various interactions, concepts, and practices, which unfold in the context of a specific time and place (metaphors of uncertainty, chaos, and contingency). Cultures exist in a state of ambivalence and dialectics. From the global standpoint, they are still connected to specific places and human groups, but they must also be understood as knots in the global cultural flow (Barker, 2001).

The implicit vision of monolingual, monocultural, mono-ethnic, and mono-confessional nation states has been, at least in academic discourse, demythologized and deconstructed, while the same vision has been preserved in everyday life, and, even more so, in the political and media discourse, where its anti-modern dimensions have sometimes been strengthened and radicalized (Beck, 2003). The centrifugal force of globalizing processes has accelerated, though it has not triggered critical thought in the direction of multilingualism, multiculturalism, and multi-ethnicity as a *de facto* condition both on the national and local levels. It has, to the contrary, set in motion the centripetal force of resuscitating national and

<sup>3</sup> *Authenticity as a synonym of genuineness, credibility, originality (SSKJ, 2000).*

<sup>4</sup> *The concept of autochthony as “characteristic of those who are originally from the place where they live: therefore domestic, indigenous, aboriginal” (SSKJ, 2000) is not clearly defined nor are there clearly defined standards according to which one could judge if a certain culture, tradition, or heritage is autochthonous or not. This is why the use of the term arouses a certain amount of suspicion insofar as it might be arbitrary.*

<sup>5</sup> *Tradition as a collection of habits, customs, and ways of life, in short a collection of those properties that have “established themselves in the life of a community by being passed from generation to generation” (SSKJ, 2000).*

<sup>6</sup> *Heritage as that “which is taken from the past” (SSKJ, 2000).*

local identities, cultures, and heritages, particularly from the 1980s onward (Matsuura in Wong, 2005: 17; Aikawa in Wong, 2005: 81).<sup>7</sup> “Heritage has become a popular term, often replacing culture, history and archaeology (...) Even natural heritage has been placed in the service of national heritage” (Karim, 1997: 78). As we mentioned before, interests, especially political, for national, regional, and local heritage, as well as nostalgia for individual collective pasts, acquired the ideological stain of exclusivity, the desire to erase others and otherness, and, worse still, of hatred and discrimination. This occurred on both the global and local levels, especially in conservative and right-leaning circles. At the same time, “revivals” of identities and cultures were celebrated, even those of so-called “sleeping identities” such as Australian aboriginal, Inuits in Arctic Canada, Bedouins in Egypt, Maoris in New Zealand, Catalonians in Spain, etc. (Scholte in Rizman, 2008: 73). If we also take into account the issue of contemporary migration, we face the following dilemma: how do we include the presence of the other in the received mythological images of linguistically, ethnically, and confessionally monolithic communities (local, regional, and national), keeping in mind that the inclusion unfolds in the frame of emphasizing and amplifying local and regional identities, cultures, heritages, collective memories of the past. Karim remained sceptical of this process, stating that “...the fundamental issue of blending a monocultural past with a multicultural present remains unresolved” (Karim, 1997: 79). It seems that the demythologization and deconstruction of unified (in terms of language, culture, ethnicity, and religion) communities and their identities in the past, replaced by the perception of plural, multilingual (as well as languages with multiple dialects), multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-confessional identities is at the very least an important part of, if not a necessary pre-condition for, the finding a solution to this problem. In subsequent sections, we will continue to explore the question of what happens to existing local (territorial) cultures, identities, and traditions, and how it is possible to capture their complexity, the intertwinement of “external” and global forces with “internal” and local forces, and also how to transcend binary categories, and at the time respect multiculturalism or cultural pluralism as a necessary imperative of each and every analysis as reflexive of both contemporary and past perceptions of cultures and identities.

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<sup>7</sup> *Processes of integration in the western world – such as the free market agreement (NAFTA) between the US, Canada, and Mexico in 1992, with which these countries created a common market, and the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 that united European Union member countries politically, legally, and economically – represented important milestones.*

## The (Re)construction of Local Cultures and Identities, and the Effort to Deconstruct the Binary Oppositions of Old and New Localisms on the Basis of Multiculturalism

What place does locality have in global cultural flows? Does locality, in this “dramatically delocalized world” in which the nation state confronts a variety of transnational destabilizations, lose its ontological foundation? Appadurai understood locality relationally and contextually, and less as a scalar or spatial category, that is composed in the phenomenological sense from a network of connections between feelings of social proximity, technological interactivity, and relativity of context. At the same time, Appadurai operates within the concept of the surrounding environment and neighbourhoods as existing social forms, communities in which locality is realized in many ways. Locality is namely a very “fragile social achievement,” claims Appadurai (2011: 267), as it must even in the smallest, most geographically isolated situations protect itself against the contingencies and challenges of instability. The borders of localities are “dangerous zones” that demand a particular ritual maintenance as the feeling of inertia is a key characteristic of localities: *structures of feeling, properties of the social life, and ideologies of situated communities*. In this way, locality is understood as a producer of particular forms of intentional activities and particular types of material effects that we cannot distinguish from the real surroundings in which and with the help of which social life is reproduced. For all of these reasons, it is necessary to avoid the use of binary oppositions, such as past–present, solid–fluid, static–dynamic, on the basis of which it has often been concluded that contemporary localities, surroundings, neighbourhoods, ethnographies exist in opposition to those from the past, especially in terms of their (in)stability, (non)isolation, etc. In fact, local subjects do constantly reproduce their surroundings, but the contingency and unpredictability of individual historical periods, areas, and imaginations contain the potential for producing new (material, social, and imaginative) contexts. The dialectic between contexts of locality and surroundings, and locality and surroundings as the context, is the reason that no human community, however stable, delimited, or isolated, can be understood as static or existing outside-of-history.

Given these critical reflections of the binary understanding of the (re) production of contemporary localities in their relationship to the past, and also in their relationship to globalizing processes which we noted in the previous chapter, it seems necessary to reflect on whether we can understand these (re)constructed local (territorial) cultures and identities on the basis of the previously problematized binary definitions of old, traditional and new, regional localisms, as Raymondo Strassoldo discussed in particular (in Mlinar, 2012). Old traditional localism is generally viewed as original, unreflecting,



necessary, natural, closed and self-sufficient, exclusivist and tending toward isolation, the minimalization of contact with the outside world, and the preservation of strong closed borders. New localism is generally viewed as voluntary, conscious, deliberate (rational), as well as being open to the wider world and connected to it through collective work and intensive reciprocal relationships formed on the basis of the selective establishment of supra-local connections. As we will try to illustrate in the subsequent chapter with the concrete example of the town of Idrija, this kind of locality might be understood as the ideal combination of old and new localisms, or with greater explanatory power, understood in the sense of being located on the continuum from a more exclusivist, self-sufficient, separate, and introverted localism to a more inclusive, open, connected, and extroverted localism. Above all, localisms must be viewed in the context of the cyclical repetition of periods past and present, when the entwinement of “internal” and “external” has been relatively intense. It is true that certain cultural practices or manifestations of culture have been more or less abandoned to external forces, though never in a totally exclusivist manner. In periods of greater intensity, there is also the possibility that the critical reflection of existing traditions, a potential source of domination and dogmatism, becomes greater and not necessarily to the detriment of “the aura of authenticity” (Arantes in Wong, 2005: 69). Moreover, cultural tradition only survives if it is ceaseless (re)created in new contexts and, in this process, is capable of integrating scientific rationality and the desacralization of nature and itself. “The problem is not simply to repeat the past, but rather to take root in it in order to ceaselessly invent,” says Paul Ricoeur (1955/1998: 282). This also requires a certain freedom in culture and tradition, allowing individuals and the community to engage in criticism, adaptation, transformation, amalgamation, and open reflection on existing cultural practices, patterns, and norms (McLean in Hogan, 2005:46, Van Ginkel in Wong, 2005: 24-25). Therefore, it is necessary to allow localisms and local cultures in their contextual productivity and contextual dependence to have a certain autonomy within the changing surroundings of both the nation state and global world. In this regard, it is precisely the relationship between locality as context and context as locality that is interesting. The transformation of contexts in which local and national cultures (re)produce must be a part of any study of the phenomena of cultural globalization, or rather the globalization of cultures. To limit such a study to changes in cultural identities and values in the time of globalization would be to succumb to “methodological parallelism” (Rizman, 2008), in accordance with which we equate the global paradigm of cultural processes with the paradigm of cultural processes on the level of the nation state.

The space of context or identification to which local as well as regional and national identities are connected, whether that space is actual or



imagined, is simultaneously also symbolic, cultural, imaginary (Appadurai, 2011), extra-temporal, “sensed and felt”, and thus emotionally charged. Because of this, the explanations of globalization, which arise largely from the logic of instrumental, economically rational reasons for increased mobility and inclusiveness in the global world, are insufficient and reductionist. Goods, capital, and ideas travel more quickly than people, which is why their degree of globalization is more rapid (Mlinar, 2012: 173). As Strassoldo put it:

*... post-modern man/woman, just because he/she is so deeply embedded in global information flows, may feel the need to revive small enclaves of familiarity, intimacy, security, intelligibility, organic-sensuous interaction, in which to mirror him/herself, contrary to the process occurring in front of the subjectivity-effacing TV screen. The possibility of being exposed, through modern communication technology, to the whole infinity of places, persons, things, ideas, makes it all the more necessary to have, as a compensation, a centre in which to cultivate one's self. The easy access to the whole world, with just a little time and money, gives new meaning to the need of a subjective centre – a home, a community, a locale – from which to move and to which to return and rest (Strassoldo, 2004: 52).*

The paradox of global thinking is namely that when we try to conceive of more integrated, all-encompassing units, the differences or particularities of people or specific groups of people become more abstract. The process itself becomes depersonalizing (McLean in Hogan, 2005: 63). Moreover, individual and social perceptions of globalization are exceptionally selective and one-dimensional, and are based on “two rules of access”: the first is unhindered free access for us to others, the second is controlled and monitored access of others to us (Mlinar, 2012: 180). In short, our openness is one-dimensional and selective. In this way, territorial culture and identity remains traditional in the sense of spatial connectedness, homogeneity, and clear physical and social boundaries. Moreover, in Mlinar’s opinion, the boundaries are also increasingly subject to transformations and (re)constructions in the sense of the diminishment of their exclusivist nature and the increase of universal presence, flexibility, and diversity. This reconstruction, which we have already discussed, should flow in the direction of critically selective association. The more varied the characteristics a unit (individual or territorial community) acquires, the greater is the likelihood that the unit will combine them in a unique way. Thus units become increasingly similar to a greater number of other units in terms of their individual components. Yet, because of the infinite combinations of these characteristics,

the units will still differ from each other (Mlinar, 2012: 80). And yet we must not over generalize this statement because each place/city is confronted with more choices, which dictate how and in what manner its own specific characteristics will be preserved and advanced, or disappear.

The choice for pluralism, and for the pluralism that results from the co-existence of manifold diverse identities and cultures which we call multiculturalism or cultural pluralism respectively as a process of advancing the multicultural and cumulative potentials of peoples from different traditions, is the last point we will address in our discussion about the meaning of selective, critical, and newly conceptualized and reconstructed (local) traditions, identities, and culture. This is because of its relevance to the point of departure of this article and its continuing themes. Paul Ricoeur once wrote that human alienation is never total. "Man is certainly a stranger to man, but always similar." This is why cultures, despite their differences, are communicable (Ricoeur, 1998: 282). Multiculturalism or cultural pluralism respectively is that concept, with the help of which we can examine "the self-evident" status of individual received traditions and identities rather than simply rejecting them. Or to paraphrase Peter Berger, pluralism does not necessarily change what people believe in, but the manner in which they believe (Berger in Hogan, 2005: 4). In addition, the starting premise of cultural pluralism is the possibility (or rather making it possible) that people with different traditions, stories, and (con)texts can encounter each other and coexist. To remain more or less within one's own story and own traditions means to be condemned to one's own borders, to those that have already been established and not received, without even trying to examine and move the borders, let alone destroy them. The encounter with different traditions also allows for new reflection on one's own traditions, the opportunity to re-experience and reinterpret them, to search for new meanings, and perhaps even to abandon some.

*... [O]ther persons with other experiences are precious in order to liberate me from my restrictions in relations to my own tradition in my circumstances. They enable me to get beyond these limitations, to escape what has deceived me or held me captive and to learn from new experiences. (...) The ability to listen to others is the ability to assimilate the implications of their answers for unfolding my own tradition (McLean in Hogan, 2005: 76).*

This sort of listening demands sensitivity to "the other" or to "the different." Cultural pluralism therefore demands that people become susceptible to cultural heterogeneity, that is to "the other" and to "the different", and this often requires critical thought and the abandonment of concepts such as

egocentrism, logocentrism, and ethnocentrism, which are an inherent part of certain cultures and traditions on one side, and of globalizing processes on the other. All three concepts are mutually connected and strengthen each other as strategies of transforming “the other” with the intention of assimilating what is “foreign” or “other” into that which is not foreign, into our own characteristics, and in this way suppressing “the other”, and enforcing conformity. Only confrontation with other cultures and with “the other” within one’s own culture and the foreign within ourselves enables perception and reflection from the position of “the other”: that is, heterological reflection that at least temporarily suspends our feelings of self and allows us to contemplate it through the eyes of “the other”. However, the demystification of “the other” has not taken place, despite globalizing processes, or looked at another way, because of them. The intention of “making-the-world-familiar” has not fulfilled its expectations. Rather, the expansion of the field of what is known also means the expansion of the sphere of the unknown. “Knowing more about it does not make the world any less complex,” says Morin (in Wong, 2005: 89).

Even though or perhaps precisely because of the fact that individual and collective perceptions of the globalized flow of culture can be extremely selective and one-dimensional, we need a perspective that makes the relationship between the global and the local, and also the past and the present, understood in the manner of “fusion of horizons” as Gadamer puts it. And when we speak about context, we need to keep in mind that “without the horizon of the past, the horizon of the present would have no form at all” (Gadamer in Hogan, 2005: 6). The greatest challenge of cultural pluralism is located precisely in this density and complexity, and also in the contradictory and exclusive quality of the global and the local, the past and the modern, the received and the new, the similar and the different, and the ceaseless movement in the pursuit of balance and their mutual fertilization. Or as Brian Fay puts it (in Hogan, 2005: v):

*If we insist too heavily on dramatic dissimilarity then we lose the capacity to understand others (and therefore the capacity to appreciate their difference). If we insist on their dramatic similarity, then we lose the capacity to appreciate and understand difference and therefore see ourselves everywhere we turn. In relating to others the choice is not difference or similarity; it is difference and similarity.*

## An Example of Local Identity: the Town of Idrija between the “Hills” and Global Worlds

There is probably little doubt that the town of Idrija and its surroundings is an example *non plus ultra* of a geographically removed and delimited “hill” town. In the past five hundred years, it has accumulated, either because of its isolation or despite it, an extremely specific cultural, natural, and technical (industrial) heritage. There are numerous historical sources explaining this specific heritage as well contemporary research including monographs, articles, and reports, which will not be examined in detail here, but will be drawn on when it is necessary to answer the questions posed in the introduction: namely, how much and in what manner does a “hill” town with a cultural and economic global presence and a strong tradition, need to create a differentiated, selective, critical relationship to its past and traditions as a basis for the reconstruction of its contemporary local identity, and what does this mean within the institutionalized global frame from the standpoint of its global symbolic presence? When we speak about a global cultural presence, we have in mind the 2012 inscription of Idrija on the list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and the town’s indirect economic presence on global markets because of the Idrija-based transnational company Kolektor, which is a supplier of automobile parts for international producers of automobile systems, and is also active in construction and industrial technology, energetics, and products for the home. Kolektor has its headquarters in Idrija from which it oversees a network of nearly thirty enterprises in Europe, Asia, and America (Kolektor).<sup>8</sup>

UNESCO’s list of world heritage sites represents an intergovernmental or international recognition of “*outstanding universal values*”, either in the domain of culture or nature, which emerged from the *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage*.<sup>9</sup> Idrija, or more specifically its tradition of mercury mining, is the third site in Slovenia to be included on the UNESCO list.<sup>10</sup> Because UNESCO is an intergovernmental institution, it is crucial in the nominating process to be recommended

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<sup>8</sup> Another important transnational company, Hidria, has its headquarters in Spodnja Idrija, some four kilometres from Idrija itself. Like Kolektor, it oversees a substantial network of companies around the world that are engaged in the production and sales of ventilation systems and automobile technologies (Hidria).

<sup>9</sup> The Convention is available on <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>. The Convention’s Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention” are available on <http://whc.unesco.org/en/guidelines/>.

<sup>10</sup> The Škocjanske caves were inscribed on the list of UNESCO Natural Heritage Sites in 1986. In 2011, the pile dwellings in the Ljubljana Marshes were inscribed in the UNESCO list, together with Switzerland, France, Germany, Austria, and Italy, as part of a series of nominations of pre-historical pile dwellings in the Alps.

by the country and not the local community. Idrija's inscription was the consequence of a series of transnational nominations of Spain and Slovenia for their heritage in the industry of mercury mining, namely being home to the largest mercury mines in the world: in Almadén (Spain) and Idrija (Slovenia).<sup>11</sup> At the forefront of these two world heritage sites are the mercury and the technological-industrial procedures that shaped cultural, economic, and social transformations, and which left visible material traces in specific cultural expressions, knowledge, and traditions preserved in both Almadén and Idrija. The extraction and use of mercury was extremely important for the development of the techniques and technologies that informed and characterized the life and culture of mining towns, the wider region, and the world as a whole. It was a sort of "bilateral cultural fertilization" that took place on both sides of Atlantic Ocean.<sup>12</sup> From the sixteenth century onward, mercury, cheaply acquired in the process of amalgamation, flowed in great quantities to Europe, a form of capital that caused and facilitated the rapid and global development of economic and other activities connected with it. An important contemporary aspect of this story was the research activities associated with mercury mining, especially after introduction of a complete ban in 2011 of the use of this metal in all the member countries of the European Union, focussing on the implementation of a convention about mercury and strategies for reducing its harmful influence on the environment and on people's health. Among other things, Idrija's inscription on the UNESCO list obligated the Idrija local community and the Republic of Slovenia:

*...to enable and assure the comprehensive, coordinated, efficient, and irreproachable protection of the cultural and natural heritages, and their active and stimulating role in economic and social development.*

<sup>11</sup> It is worth mentioning that the original idea for nomination came from a 2006 intercontinental series entitled "Quicksilver and Silver on the Intercontinental Camino Real", in which Huancavelica, Peru also participated as the third largest mercury mine in the world. The intercontinental Camino Real was a system of land and sea traffic lanes, commercial strongholds, military security, monetary control, etc. put into place by the Spanish Court in collaboration with the Viennese Habsburgs and their agents. Up until the beginning of the twentieth century, nearly all of the world's mercury was extracted from these three mines using the process of amalgamation. This was especially important in Latin America, which had a key role in the industrial revolution in that part of the world. After the withdrawal of Peru, a series of nominations took place for technical heritage in connection with the mining of mercury and silver. The mining cities of Almadén (Spain), Idrija (Slovenia), and San Luis Potosí (Mexico) participated in this process, but the joint nomination did not receive sufficient support for inscription, because all nominated regions did not fulfil the criteria of outstanding universal values (Dossier).

<sup>12</sup> Two mining sites in the US paid homage to both Almadén and Idrija. There was a New Almadén and a New Idrija, both located in California. The cinnabar mined in New Almadén was used by native Americans before mineral ores were discovered in 1820 and in some ways this triggered the California Gold Rush. Exploitation of New Idrija, the second mine in mercury production in the US, following New Almadén, began in 1854 (Dossier).

*The mercury mine in Idrija must be transformed from a mining-metallurgical concern into an institution active in the comprehensive protection of the technical heritage of Idrija and its surroundings (first with the renovation of the complex of smelters and river locks), the technical maintenance of accessible parts of the mine, the restoration of objects and machinery, the monitoring of the surroundings for toxic waste resulting from five hundred years of mercury extraction, as well as research, presentation of knowledge, and the promotion of local, national, and world heritage, etc. (Kramberger, 2009).*

What does this sort of institutionalization in the global frame that inclusion on the UNESCO list brings, and namely the symbolic presence on a global level of an otherwise geographically remote town, mean for the local identity of Idrija? Most people asked this question agreed that it represents both an obligation (Simonič-Mervic, 2013) and an opportunity, and it will depend on Idrija itself to take advantage of the opportunity by both expanding and promoting itself in the outside world and by opening its inner horizons as well (Trušnovec, 2013). The potential is all the greater because it involves a Slovenian-Spanish collaboration that will require – both in form and content – that each partner imports and exports ideas, production, and consumption. The global symbolic (geographical) proximity of Idrija to the world obtained with the UNESCO triumph will lose its power if we do not, in terms of mentality, space, and objects, infiltrate the global way of thinking about and valuing (our own and other's) ideas (Trušnovec, 2013). Jože Čar<sup>13</sup> (2013) observes that there is no general recognition of the significance of Idrija's inclusion on the UNESCO list, which should in fact be a common project with a clearly defined concept shared by all residents. Tatjana Dizdarevič<sup>14</sup> and Martina Peljhan<sup>15</sup> (2013) do not view the geographic remoteness of Idrija or the physical smallness of Slovenia as an obstacle to this process. To the contrary, Idrija's inscription on the UNESCO list makes the town and its heritage interesting once again (as it was in the past), though again predominantly because of its professional sectors (architecture, archaeology, ecology, etc.), and now the tourism sector as well as Idrija

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<sup>13</sup> Dr. Jože Čar, retired professor in the Department of geology at the Faculty of Natural Sciences and Engineering, University of Ljubljana, comentator, member of *Idrijski razgledi* editorial board and its previous editor. *Idrijski razgledi* is a local studies magazine that has been issued by the Idrija Municipal Museum since 1956, and has been published longer than any other magazine in the Primorska (Littoral) region.

<sup>14</sup> Tatjana Dizdarevič, B.S.M.E., head of monitoring at Idrija Mercury Mine, Ltd. – in liquidation, member of the working group for preparation of UNESCO nomination »Heritage of Mercury: Almadén and Idrija« and member of *Idrijski razgledi* editorial board.

<sup>15</sup> Martina Peljhan, B.S.M.Geol., head of mine museum Anthony's Main Road at Idrija Mercury Mine, Ltd. – in liquidation and president of Idrija Museum Association.

becomes an interesting tourist destination. In addition, the UNESCO inscription opens new opportunities for linkages and collaboration not only on the intergovernmental level but also on the local level in less institutionalized forms. For instance, Idrija has already enjoyed a similar sort of connection with Minamata, Japan, as both settlements have undergone the rather rare historical experience of suffering through the environmental and health consequences caused by the presence of mercury in the local environment: Idrija because of a half a millennium of mining and extracting mercury, and Minamata because of industrial waste in the water that flowed into Minamata's seaside bay for several years and represents one of the worst cases of industrial pollution in the history of humanity.<sup>16</sup>

Already it is clear that Idrija's history has been replete with important economic, commercial, and intercultural exchange of goods and commodities, as well as knowledge, customs, discoveries, and skills, and also with the development of individual scientific and technological disciplines and cultural practices. Not only trading routes, but skills and discoveries that changed thinking in a number of fields also made their way from Idrija out to the wider world. The same routes that were used for the export of mercury were also used to delivery essential goods into the town and eased the travel of new settlers who came to work in the mine, not only miners but mining experts. Scientists and scholars were drawn to Idrija by its exceptional nature and by the rarity of its ore deposits. Their presence helped to shape the history of individual branches of science in Idrija. The importance of the mine was instrumental in the establishment of schools, which in turn led to intercultural dialogue and the exchange of skills and knowledge among various regions. Throughout its history, the Viennese court promoted the development and transfer of skills and knowledge. The same routes used for mercury were also used to export Idrijan lace, created by miners' wives from the seventeenth century onwards. The development of the natural sciences in Idrija traces its roots from the sixteenth century onwards (Joannes Antonius Scopoli<sup>17</sup>, Balthasar Hacquet, Franc Hladnik, Henrik Freyer, Georg Dolliner, Marko Vincenc Lipold, Franz Kossmat, Josef Kropáč, etc). Education also played a crucial role in shaping Idrija. At the end of the 1950s and early 1960s, Idrija became home to the world famous "Idrija School of Geology". The mine itself had close contacts with the outside world and strived to be

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<sup>16</sup> At the beginning of 2011, the municipality of Idrija and experts in the study of mercury put forward a proposal to establish closer friendly and professional ties between Idrija and Minamata. Representatives from the Japanese city accepted this offer. Closer cooperation meant above all the exchange of experience, knowledge, and good practices, in connection with mercury, the environment, and health on the level of both national research institutions and local institutions and the effected population.

<sup>17</sup> Scopoli wrote his best-known works in Idrija, including a book on Idrija's mercury entitled "De Hydrargyro Idriensi". He also wrote "Tentamina Physico-Chimico-Medica", printed in Venice in 1761.



on the cutting edge of mining methods and metallurgy, courting renowned international experts, promoting the development of science, and demanding ingenuity and creativity from its employees. The Idrija mine was also important for the development of health and social security. Indeed, the first forms of organized health care and social security for workers in Slovenian lands first appeared in Idrija. The foundations of occupational medicine were created in an effort to prevent job-related illnesses. Finally, a special mining culture with very specific traits emerged from the mercury mine that are still manifested in the town's material and non-material heritage. These traits influenced the means and systems used for transportation (such as ship building), architecture, formal urban patterns, non-material heritage, technological and cultural exchange, culture in interaction with the environment, craftwork, and symbols etc. (Dossier).

As is apparent from the above description, Idrija had created a lively international society as early as the beginning of the sixteenth century, "a true Europe in miniature" as Čar (2013) described it, which had a decisive influence in shaping the profile of the town and its residents. It should be noted in this regard that there was a large discrepancy between what was a somewhat elite society of powerful technicians (geologists, miners, metallurgists), more generally educated society (doctors, educators, and politicians), experts and innovators (such as Steinberg, Čermak, and Špirek), and scientists (Scopoli, Hacquet, Lipold, and Mlakar) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the working-class mining population from Idrija and its surroundings, which had a reputation for technical inventiveness ("jacks-of-all-trades"), social and societal culture, and above all great social security. These elements made up the typical Idrija resident: sociable, with a talent for a particular form of humour and social sensitivity, but at the same, not overly ambitious in terms of entrepreneurial spirit. The contacts between these two levels of society were rather weak. The attitude from the mining side (because of the social security they enjoyed) was respectful, but also demanding. These qualities resulted in a political and professional awakening at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (the first socialist mayor, political-societal vitality, the establishment of the first Slovenian nonclassical secondary school, etc.). All the same, the situation described above more or less persisted until the 1970s and the first closing of the mine. Today, this character has faded to the monocultural and gray self-sufficiency that Milanka Trušnovc<sup>18</sup> observed (2013). Dizdarević and Peljhan (2013), however, disagree, believing that Idrija remains a magnet for experts, especially in the field of environmental science and other technological fields (Kolektor).

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<sup>18</sup> Milanka Trušnovc, MA in Slovene language, director of Idrija Public Library.

But in what way does the contemporary discourse and related activities in the field of protection, especially in terms of the reinterpretation of Idrija's local heritage, reflect the past coexistence of various cultures in a town that was historically open to the world? This heritage should not be understood as merely local, as Dizdarević and Peljhan insist (2013), because technological progress took place within an international frame and the exchange of knowledge among European experts was always a factor.<sup>19</sup> How crucial was the aspect of Idrija's multicultural heritage? Here we arrive at the central question posed in the introduction which we come to again from Mlinar's assumption that in Slovenia we non-reflexively and unconsciously accept "the cumulative effects" of three types of communitarianism that limit the space for human individuality and autonomy: traditionalist, communist, and nationalist, the first of which seems to dominate in Idrija, our chosen case study:

*The accumulation of all three by a sort of non-reflexive inertia has had a strong influence over our lives and our activities, like a concealed common dimension in politics (...), culture, and even more specific professional fields such as architecture. (...) As far as the protection of culture is concerned, the emphasis is solely on the principle of continuity in the sense of the a priori exclusion of the new, rather than a dialog between the old and the new (Mlinar, 2012: 247).*

We often continue to preserve what is unwanted from the past, not to abandon it altogether or even change it, and we do this on the basis of a simplified and erroneous supposition that we must preserve the old, including that which, in a certain place and for certain people, may be a burden and hold us back (such as stereotypes, prejudices, obsolete convictions, habits, approaches, and ways of acting). In fact, it would be necessary to engage with these elements, to dismiss, transcend, or replace them, or to complement with the new, the innovative, and the contemporary. Despite the increase in the number of daily commuters in and out of Idrija, "the autochthonous population, which represents the solid foundation for preserving linguistic and other local specificities" (Mlinar, 2012: 336), remains dominant and tends to confirm the abovementioned assumption. Therefore, we also face the issue of whether a geographically remote and delimited place (also on the institutional and individual or community level) has the capacity to draw on a selective, critical, and innovative relationship to the past

<sup>19</sup> As an example, we might mention the technology of the smelting ovens, which became known at the very least on the European level (Spain, Russian), if not even farther afield (Dizdarević and Peljhan, 2013).

and traditions in order to reconstruct its own identity in a new, dynamic, not historically and contextually given, but open and active manner. In addition to renewing the local cultural heritage and revitalizing it through new constructions projects (one of the conditions of Idrija's inscription on the UNESCO list), we must also ask what will be the content, and what will be the quality of the content, of Idrija's renewed and/or revitalized cultural heritage. A telling event in this regard was the closure of Idrija's old cinema hall several years ago, and, along with it, the end of the regular presentation of films in a building that was once the main theatre in Idrija and is considered the oldest preserved theatrical venue in Slovenia (dating from around 1770). The reasons for this kind of termination of cultural activities are largely irrelevant (except perhaps for economic reasons), though it could also be attributed to the global influence of modern information technology (residents prefer to go to cineplexes, which are located in larger cities, and to access films through the internet). We do not want to diminish the significance of globalizing processes with this argument, but simply to emphasize the contradictions or ambivalence of (cultural) globalization, which is not a synonym for the cultural homogenization of the world, but neither does it necessarily mean an automatic increase of diversity, freedom of choice, and (cultural) enrichment. A second example of this sort of phenomena is Idrija's new city square designed by Boris Podrecca, which gives the town an open, spacious, and contemporary appearance, but is – with the exception of the occasional local markets, fairs, and ethological and other performances – dead in terms of content.

Not only because of the recent recognition of the town, but also and above all for its own greater sense of cultural-mental broadness, depth, and openness, the population of Idrija should more intensively emphasize, interpret, reflect, and – why not? – sell this type of multicultural tradition/message. “In this sense, we are too sclerotic, without ideas or large scale vision or lucidity, either in the aspect or the contemporary approach to the promotion of our past multiculturalism” (Trušnovc, 2013). Milanka Trušnovc and Karmen Simonič–Mervic<sup>20</sup> (2013) agree that it would be necessary to create a narrative from Idrija's historical individuals and achievements. Stories with contemporary content rooted in and arising from traditions that served us in the past. In this way, the old is resuscitated, otherwise it will only vegetate like some kind of uninteresting fossil or item exhibited in a museum – with all due respect to the activities of the Idrija Museum. It is possible (necessary?) to make a show – or at least a story – out of every Blagay daphne and Zois' bellflower (Trušnovc, 2013).

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<sup>20</sup> Karmen Simonič–Mervic, teacher of history and geography at Črni Vrh Primary School, commentator, and member of *Idrijski razgledi* editorial board.

*Can all these wise men, no women are among them unfortunately be heroes in our times? How do we introduce them to young people? With memorial plaques on the facades of department stores? How do we convince people to float along the Zala River and to overcome the prejudice that it is nothing more than an obsolete channel of transportation? How do we convince people that the story of mercury is interesting? How do we convince them to take a look around this little town that you can get to know in one day? How do we convince young people to examine the relics of the past, the mine, for instance, about which no one thinks anymore but into each shaft so much human energy was invested, so much fear overcome, so much dust? How many people are really interested by the town's impressive technological achievements? Just look at the old dwellings of miners, which have no meaning anymore? What I miss is stories. And not just stories about the miners' black reality and the whiteness of the lace: on one side, man's hard, grim dark labour, and on the other, women's labour, soft and pure. Those are clichés. But the clichés could be applied to both sides. In its own way, the miners' crass humour was pure; it purified the soul. As for the woman, the mother, housework did not only shine with the whiteness of lace; mostly she had to worry about how to feed her family. Stories begin for children. But our stories lack action, play, activities, like when you go on a visit and something happens. When there are emotions. The story of the bucket maker, the story of Saint Anton, the story of Bloudek, the story of Korle at the fountain, or Janez with his birdcage and the bird inside of it (Simonič-Mervic, 2013).*

Čar (2013) sees a special connection between Idrija's past mining and professional traditions and the advanced technical and technological development of companies such as Kolektor and Hidria who exhibit a "responsive affinity" to the locale ("with a somewhat less capitalistic greed and somewhat more social orientation"). This connection can be further seen in the preservation, assessment, and inscription of the remnants of Idrija's mining technology into a global frame (UNESCO), the protection and assessment of Idrija's natural heritage with the strong cooperation of local communities (Geopark Idrija), the planned establishment of an international institute for mercury, the introduction and development of Idrija lace in an international frame, the professional training of staff who will be capable of presenting Idrija's technical and natural heritage in a high-quality manner<sup>21</sup>, and the Idrija School of Geology which enjoys an excellent reputation in

<sup>21</sup> Two examples of this both in terms of content and the technical innovation of the exhibits were "Anno Domini 1511" and "Idrija zibelka naravoslovja" [Idrija cradle of natural sciences], both at the Slovenian Museum of Natural History (Čar, 2013).

the field, and because of which Idrija has recently acquired a new, modern, and innovative stratigraphic-structural geological map with an encyclopaedically conceived interpreter and wide applicability. However, all of this draws attention to some serious problems, above all, the smallness of the town and the shortage of innovative people who would have the knowledge and energy to continue the development of traditional and other types of activities, within UNESCO, Geopark, and other projects. These problems cause delays and confused policy-making in general. Anti-social and selfish “capitalist logic” also poses an additional obstacle as well as the ongoing disputes between the management of both of Idrija’s transnational companies (Kolektor and Hidria). The result is the lack of an over-all concept, the lack of “internal” logic and linkages between various content in the development of Idrija’s tourist sector. Moreover, there is as yet no clear vision or concrete action in terms of the establishment of an international institute for mercury in Idrija.

Dizdarević and Peljhan (2013) have described the experience they gleaned from Idrija’s inscription on the UNESCO list: namely, that in the protection of the cultural heritage (architecture for example), we must not blindly follow the principle of continuity in the sense of the *a priori* exclusion of the new, but rather we must create a dialog between the new and the old, and that Idrija (both its institutions and its people) is capable of a selective, critical, and innovative relationship to the past, its tradition, and heritage. This could be demonstrated in the project Idrija – a smart town that uses integrated systems solutions in the fields of infrastructure, green heating, broadband access, etc. – in the context of which Idrija is slated to become a green and environmentally smart town by 2015.

And what significance does the presence of transnational companies in Idrija have from the standpoint of globalizing processes (conducting business on the global level, mass/cultural tourism, migration, contemporary information technology) and of local lifeworlds (heritage, local tourism, etc.)? Dizdarević and Peljhan believe that the development of new technologies in Idrija during the period of the gradual closing of the mine proves that Idrija residents want to preserve their special way of life in the town. The story in Almadén and many other mining towns was different. When mines closed in other mining towns, the development of new industry did not take place and difficult social problems quickly ensued. In Idrija, to the contrary, just as the mercury mine was present on global markets for its five hundred-year history, today the transnational companies, Kolektor and Hidria, are growing their businesses on global markets. The cosmopolitanism of today’s Idrija is expressed above all, and indeed almost exclusively, in terms of the business relations of its transnational companies. There are a few exceptions in the cultural life of the town itself (for example, the lace

festival, the festival of European cultural heritage in 2012). In a speech about the role of the two transnational companies in Idrija, Trušnovc and Simonič–Mervic (2013) emphasized the narrow, market-capitalistic aspect of their activities, the sole interest in production interests, which differs from the mine, which was also active and prospered in the local public life. Kolektor and Hidria only prosper globally, and locally to the extent that it serves their interests, not the needs of the town. “These are two separate worlds, or even more worlds. As a result of the presence of transnational companies in the town, Idrija is even smaller than it actually is” (Simonič–Mervic, 2013).

### Concluding Thoughts

It would be overly optimistic to conclude that difference itself is losing its status as the primary standard in the processes of constructing individual and collective identities. Individuals, towns and localities continue to identify themselves on the basis of differences from others. However, it would be overly pessimistic to conclude that difference as the primary standard has not been diminished at all (at least in certain circumstances that may be significantly linked to wider contextual, globalizing flows). Likewise, it would also be overly pessimistic to conclude that the static binary opposition between “local” and “foreign,” “autochthonous” and “non-autochthonous” remain unaffected by dynamic and complex representations derived from cultural pluralism and processes of proximity that blend “local” and “foreign”. Idrija, which we chose as our case study, is in some ways unique, but all towns and places can be considered unique. Above all, Idrija illustrates the abovementioned blending of local and foreign in a diachronical perspective in the manner of cyclical alteration between periods of greater and lesser cultural flows. If we limit ourselves to the period of Idrija’s recent past, we can conclude that the town has achieved an important, if not the most important, institutional recognition of its historical cultural and technical excellence on the European and global level. The question of what to do now is, in the opinion of those interviewed for this article, Idrija’s greatest challenge. What has been recognized is “Idrija’s heritage” and the recipients of this recognition are people of all generations, regardless of ethnic, national, cultural, sexual, or confessional affiliation who have co-created life in these hills. Precisely because of this, we must start a conversation about how and where we should go with our rich historical tradition, which is an obligation, a responsibility, and sometimes a burden, and this conversation must be broadened to include different segments of the public, to invite their imagination in reinterpreting this heritage, and creating innovative, daring, and compelling human stories. These stories will not be comprised of recycled clichés, stereotypes, holy or mythical local content, but instead

will critically confront them, be challenged by them in a contemporary, diverse, and pluralistic way, compete with them, build upon by them, and ultimately transcend them.

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