

Meanings and Uses of Material Cultural Heritage in the Town of Hvar

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The article takes issue with the distinction between tangible and intangible heritage and the duality between the symbolic and instrumental (profit-generating) value of heritage. Based on ethnographic research in a tourist destination on the Croatian coast, the article interrogates what happens when built culture and urban public spaces are still part of living culture in a locality. It demonstrates dissonant meanings and uses of heritage that arise from the intangible and socially constructed nature of material heritage for local users. Beyond the symbolic and instrumental meanings and uses of heritage, its societal, experiential meaning is underlined as it is a part of living societal culture that is consumed on a daily basis. In the end, the article reflects on the limits of local community engagement in heritage processes.

Keywords: cultural monuments, intangible heritage, heritage work, dissonance, tourism

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Heritage is everywhere, “in the news, in the movies, in the marketplace – in everything from galaxies to genes,” wrote David Lowenthal more than twenty years ago (Lowenthal, 1998: xiii). Heritage is perceived as a “constitutive cultural process that identifies those things and places that can be given meaning and value as ‘heritage’” (Smith, 2006: 3). As it reflects “contemporary cultural and social values, debates and aspirations” (ibid.), it is perceived as “human centered, socially constructed, more of a public than a private good, and a common legacy belonging to all mankind” (Loulanski, 2006: 208).

The proposition that tourism escalates “the process by which a way of life becomes heritage” (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 7) resonates today just as it did twenty-five years ago. It is relevant for many locations undergoing tourist development with the view of developing cultural or heritage tourism. Based on ethnographic research in a tourist destination on the Croatian coast, in the town of Hvar on the eponymous island, the article explores what happens when material cultural assets and urban public spaces become cultural heritage and a location is on its way to becoming a cultural destination. Taking a cue from the assumption that cultural assets have cultural and social values, meanings, and associations that differ for different people (Smith, 2006), the article shows that “heritage fashioners” or conservation experts (Lowenthal, 1998) and “placeusers” or residents (Kimball, Brunswig, McBeth, Thomas, 2013) do not share the same idea of heritage. While heritage fashioners act on, conserve, and manage buildings and sites based on the “primacy of the heritage object” to which they ascribe value in its own right (Loulanski, 2006: 215), these buildings and sites are primarily part of people’s experiences of sociability, of their everyday life habits, cultural values, and identity. Tensions over meanings and uses of cultural heritage are caused by their various roles as ordinary placeusers (the residents without an additional role in the community), as placeusers who are also managing and/or exploiting the place for touristic purposes, and those who are engaging in artistic commentary about the detrimental effects of the tourist industry. The research thus reveals stakeholders’ multiple and dissonant narratives and uses (Smith, 2006, Salazar, 2012) that surround built cultural heritage locally. The ethnographic approach and its in-depth insights into local processes aptly provide insights into the meanings of heritage in everyday life.

The article first gives an overview of selected theories of cultural heritage before it accounts for the local research context. The following sections detail the manifold meanings and uses of heritage in the local context and the dissonances that follow. The case provides ethnographically rich insight into complex community entanglements with heritage that may be inspiring for community capacity building.

Heritage, Tangible and Intangible, Intrinsically Valued, and Functional

In his famous book on heritage, David Lowenthal (1998) draws a distinction between the “two routes to the past” – history and heritage. Heritage borrows from and enlivens historical study, but it is not an inquiry into the past, contends the author. Rather, it “clarifies pasts so as to infuse them with present purposes” (ibid., xv). In other words, heritage reshapes what we inherit for current needs, or in Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett’s words, it is “a mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past” (1998: 7, 150). By stressing the processual nature of heritage, Laurajane Smith argues that its material, tangible form notwithstanding,

heritage is also a social and cultural process of passing on and receiving memories and knowledge with which we make sense of who we are and want to be. If the idea of heritage is “an act of communication and meaning making – indeed (...) an experience”, then, contends the author, all heritage is intangible (2006: 2ff).

Many authors agree that the essential role of heritage is “in husbanding community, identity, continuity, indeed history itself” (Lowenthal, 1998: xv), in constructing “ideas of individual and group identities” (David Harvey in Smith, 2006: 16) and/or in “the grand narratives of nation and class” whereby heritage is a social and cultural practice of “meaning and identity making” that enables people to develop a feeling of collective belonging to a nation (Smith, 2006: 11, 13). Smith identifies two other practices of heritage: “the management and conservation protocols, techniques and procedures that heritage managers, archeologists, architects, museum curators and other experts undertake” and its instrumentalization in tourism and leisure activities (ibid.: 13, see also Salazar, 2012). Symbolic (socio-cultural, identity building) and instrumental (economic, touristic) values and functions of heritage have been frequently analyzed as a constitutive duality of heritage causing dissonance and conflicts in heritage matters (ibid.). Some authors have proposed that a distinction be made between processes of valuing heritage toward the inside (*dar valor*) and those valorizing heritage in tourism policies oriented toward the outside (*poner en valor*) (Nogués-Pedregal, Molero, Carmona Zubiri, 2017). Going beyond the duality between the symbolic and instrumental value of heritage, the article demonstrates additional values and functions it has for people.

The instrumental use of heritage as an economic resource is stressed by Kirschenblatt-Gimblett who points out the heritage’s economic and touristic potentiality to “give dying economies and dead sites a second life as exhibitions of themselves” (1998: 7). In her view, tourism compresses and displaces the life world while it exhibits it as a tourist attraction. Heritage is thus created through a process of exhibition; exhibition endows heritage with a second life (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 149). The second life of the life world (way of life) as heritage and exhibition of itself converts a location into a profitable destination. Therefore, heritage and tourism are undeniably collaborative industries whereby tourism makes locations economically viable as exhibits of themselves (ibid.: 151, see also Bitusikova, 2021). This may explain why tourism economies of some places are based entirely on cultural heritage (Timothy, 2021). With its focus on a tourist destination in which cultural heritage is in the process of being instrumentalized for touristic purposes, the article delves into a case in which heritage is “not yet dead” (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 8-9) but is part of a living culture, part of a local social life world. In this respect, Kirschenblatt-Gimblett’s three notions of culture are useful: culture as lived practice, culture as heritage, and the culture industry (1998: 144). All three notions of culture exist locally and are behind a variety of meanings, uses, and functions ascribed to heritage by different actors.

Many authors underline that heritage is not “pre-given”, “lost and found”, “stolen and reclaimed” and that it does not have an innate value though the Western heritage

discourse of conservation (preservation, restoration, or other) suggests the contrary, i.e., that “heritage is there prior to its identification, evaluation, conservation and celebration” (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998: 149). Contrary to the latter view, contemporary theories prioritize people as “creators, guardians, and users” of cultural heritage, and move from “object-centrism” to “functionalism” in heritage protection asserting that “cultural heritage cannot be identified as such without referring to society and its meaning for societal processes” (Loulanski, 2006: 213, 215). It is no surprise then that the functional approach finds all heritage to be intangible (cf. Deacon, Smeets, 2013).

Smith (2006) dissects the Western hegemonic “authorized heritage discourse” about material culture. The heritage discourse, the author posits, privileges “monumentality and grand scale, innate artefact/site significance tied to the time depth, scientific/aesthetic expert judgment, social consensus and nation building” (ibid.). Thus, the discourse obscures “the multi-vocality of many heritage values and meanings” (Smith, 2006: 12) or the social, cultural, and historical conflicts about the meaning, value, or nature of heritage (ibid.: 31). The conflicts over heritage have become particularly prominent among Indigenous peoples from around the world, who not only reclaim their heritage but also disclaim its interpretations by the Western discourse. Taking a cue from the argument of dissonance as an intrinsic characteristic of heritage (Ashworth, Tunbridge, 1996 in Smith, 2006: 80ff), Salazar (2012) has demonstrated the “pluriversatility” of heritage. The theory of heritage dissonance may be applied to heritage ownership, (mis)uses of heritage, and the duality of heritage being a resource of both symbolic (cultural) and economic capital (Loulanski, 2006: 212).

Building on the assumptions of intangibility and dissonance of heritage, and applying a people-centered, functional approach in regard to which heritage cannot exist independently of people (Loulanski, 2006: 216), the article analyzes the plurality of meanings and uses of heritage in a locality. It demonstrates that stakeholders ascribe different meanings to cultural heritage and treat it in complex ways: a) as a cultural value and identity marker to be preserved and curated; b) as living culture to be used and consumed on a daily basis; c) as a profit-generating resource in tourist agendas; and d) as an object of social critique. As residents, “the placeusers” (Kimball, Brunswig, McBeth, Thomas, 2013) engage with heritage sites, some may give priority to certain meanings and uses of heritage over others, while others may concurrently hold and practice dissonant ideas and uses of heritage, depending on their overlapping roles as “placeusers”, “placemanagers” (municipal leaders and employees), touristic agents, etc. Conflicts over meanings and uses of heritage follow from both situations. It is through this cacophony of meanings and uses of material heritage that its intangible and dissonant nature is established.

The data collection period in the town of Hvar spanned over seven weeks of ethnographic fieldwork between April 2021 and April 2024. The employed research methods and techniques include observation and participation in the local community’s

social life: casual conversations with numerous residents from a variety of backgrounds; in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a variety of local actors on several occasions over the data collection period (municipal employees, employees of the local tourist board and cultural institutions, tour guides, restaurateurs, owners of private accommodation, gallery owners and artists etc.). A substantial amount of information that revealed details about residents' everyday lives, the workings of the tourism sector, and cultural politics has been collected from municipal and institutional official web pages, individuals', and Hvar-centric social media groups. As part of the research project, I actively engaged in online social discussions managed by locals. Essays that I have written and made publicly available to the community have intrigued the locals and provoked lively discussions, thus offering additional data for analysis.

The Site of the Research: Party and/or Cultural Tourist Destination

Hvar is a town of 3,500 year-round residents located on the eponymous island in the Croatian Adriatic Sea. Geographically, it lies in central Dalmatia, forty miles from the nearest coastal city and port of Split. The town boasts an extensive urban history dating back to Greek and Roman times, and a long-standing tradition of tourism, the start of which can be traced to the second half of the nineteenth century (Petrić, 2018). In the past, tourism in Hvar was an elite and upper-middle-class phenomenon (*ibid.*). Due to unplanned expansion of tourism lacking a vision or strategy, over the past twenty years the clientele has been shifting from middle-class families and couples in search of rest, pristine beaches, and cultural heritage toward young travelers in search of entertainment. Efficient marketing and the rise of social media quickly spread the news of the new entertainment industry and transformed the town into a mass tourism hub for partygoers who are estimated to make up between thirty-five and forty-five percent of all visitors (Čapo, 2023).

Nearly the entire local population directly or indirectly participates in and is entirely dependent on tourism. Another feature of tourism in Hvar is its pronounced summer seasonality. The season lasts from June to September, with peaks in July and August: sixty and ninety percent of tourists arrive in July to August and June to September, respectively. During the off-season, the majority of touristic businesses are closed, with the exception of a hotel, two restaurants, and a few bars. The town experiences significant fluctuations in population; during the summer, it can increase five to seven times at peak times. In contrast, winter sees the population dwindle to just a few thousand, bringing a slower pace of life that locals refer to as “normal” (Čapo, 2022).

Locals and outsiders who have bought houses in Hvar remember nostalgically the time when the town had a “cultural image” (oral communication) and attracted

different kinds of tourists. Some remember the period of high or middle-class tourism that started developing in the 1960s, and some the period of first-class cultural events taking place in the 1980s and 1990s. A retired lady from Zagreb, who spends extended periods in Hvar commented on the past and present of life in the town:

Hvar was a pearl some twenty-five to thirty years ago. The culture was dominant, we enjoyed it here, book promotions in the loggia, excellent lectures. There weren't just some local musicians in the Franciscan monastery, but top performers, world brands, that atmosphere. (...) Culture was consumed a lot, and everything had a different touch... (...) Inside the church of St. Mark, Marak, there were exhibitions, the vestibule was beautiful, concerts took place there. Now, they are afraid that it will collapse.

"It is clear to all that cultural heritage is the town's forte. (...) We know that cultural and natural heritage are our foundation. By this, I do not mean only for tourism but for everyday life basis. We know that we need to secure this, learn how to present it, and that that is our developmental foundation in tourism and more generally in the town," said a town employee. The closing down for renovations of the main historical monuments that had previously been used as cultural and social venues coincided with the development of mass and party tourism in the mid-2000s and the inertia of successive town leaderships to restrain and redirect them. Party tourism resulted in manifold detrimental effects on the community and its quality of life (Čapo, 2023). The current municipal government, for the second time in the office, has attempted to at least alleviate some negativities (by imposing sanctions on offenders of communal rules, lower noise, etc.) since 2017, with mixed success. In addition, they came up with a new touristic strategy (Razvojna strategija turizma, 2019), invested in outdoor tourism and successfully brought to completion the long overdue renovation of several historical/cultural monuments in the town, all with the hope to develop cultural tourism and attract new types of visitors to the destination. Allegedly, the current mayor, who ran for office for the second time in 2021 – and won the elections with his independent list – based his campaign on stressing the need for developing sustainable cultural tourism (oral communication).

With many protected cultural assets under its management, the town has the capacity to make good use of the local heritage for tourism. In itself, according to a town's employee, tourism is important (not only since it is the main source of income locally): "We cannot give up on it. In any case we should not because the town was a pioneer of organized tourism in Europe.¹ This is a part of our history that has to be preserved. Actually, tourism is part of the town's identity." Thus, both tourism and cultural heritage are key identity markers of Hvar, combining them would be a solution to the problems

¹ The history of tourism is marked by the year 1868, when the tourist company Hygienic Association, was founded to develop medical tourism in Hvar (Petrić, 2018).

caused by mass and party tourism. The failure to do so in the past two decades can be attributed to the strong branding of the town as a party destination and lengthy and expensive renovations in the process of curating and turning cultural assets into a developmental resource in tourism.

Attempts at valorizing local cultural assets as tourist resources and redirecting touristic development toward cultural tourism are appearing belatedly, much later than elsewhere where heritage tourism became a significant economic and cultural phenomenon already in the mid-1970s (Smith, 2006: 25). This is happening in the town with eighty-four protected immovable (material, publicly or privately owned) cultural goods listed in the state register of protected cultural goods of the Ministry of Culture and Media of the Republic of Croatia.²

The entire old town that developed at the end of the thirteenth century on the site of a late antique settlement is a protected ensemble. It is divided into an orthogonally organized western suburb and the area inside the walls in the north, an irregularly organized southern part, and a large central square (*Pjaca*). The *Pjaca* was mostly defined during the sixteenth century; it connects the northern older area of the town, with the southern part. The eastern side is dominated by the cathedral, the bishop's seat, and the parish house. A complex of public buildings surrounding the former municipal court (seat of the civil administration from the thirteenth to the nineteenth century), of which only the town loggia and the clock tower (*leroj*) are preserved, dominates the western part of the square. The southern flank is closed by the arsenal building with the theater on the first floor and a communal storage of cereals and salt (*fontik*) on the northern ground floor of the arsenal. The municipal well (*gustirna*) was erected at the beginning of the sixteenth century on the central square. Three iconic cultural monuments in the town have recently been reopened for the public



Photo 1.: *Pjaca with gustirna, Hvar. Author: Jasna Čapo.*

² <https://min-kulture.gov.hr/eu-kultura/kulturna-bastina/registar-kulturnih-dobara-16371/16371> (accessed February 20, 2024).



Photo 2.: Loggia with the tower and fortress, Hvar. Author: Jasna Čapo.

after renovations (between 2019 and 2021): the loggia, the arsenal, and the theater. Let us see what they look like and represent for the residents of Hvar.

Cultural Assets and Their Significance Locally

It was in the loggia, which was part of the former municipal seat, that social and political life in the town was taking place since the beginning of the fifteenth century. The Hvar municipality historically met in the loggia, the court sat there, and all kinds of transactions were sealed there. The loggia underwent a series of transformations, changing its functions and uses many times over the centuries before reaching its current Mannerist style, which dates to the beginning of the seventeenth century. The municipal palace was demolished to make way for the hotel Palace Elisabeth in the early 1900s, and the loggia was renovated and opened to the public for meetings, social games, and reading. After the renovations carried out in the 1960s-1970s, the loggia became a representative hotel space. However, it kept the function of public space for the residents' use (Gamulin, 2014). It has been used for community events ever since. During the 20-year period that the arsenal (see below) was closed for renovations, social events such as children's performances, concerts, exhibits, lectures, and dances were taking place in the loggia.



Photo 3.: Arsenal in Hvar. Author: Jasna Čapo.

The arsenal, one of the largest pre-industrial buildings in former Venetian Dalmatia, is a one-story building with a rectangular floor plan, covered with a gable roof. It was built in the second half of the sixteenth century at the bottom of the harbor, on the site of an earlier building dating to at least the end of the thirteenth century, and damaged during the Venetian-Ottoman war in 1571. The arsenal was primarily used to accommodate and repair ships. The Venetian governor of Hvar, Count Pietro Semitecolo, appointed between 1611 and 1613, is usually credited with the completion of the renovation of the shipyard and, even more famously, the construction and opening of a new structure – a theater on the first floor.³ The terrace (*belveder*) erected above the communal storage, with a Renaissance balustrade, serves as a representative entrance to the theater. The interior of the theater was given a Neobaroque appearance at the beginning of the nineteenth century, at the

³ Two inscriptions, one on the eastern side of the arsenal, mentioning the year 1611 (*anno primo pacis MDCXI*), and one above the entrance to the theater, mentioning the year 1612 (*anno secundo pacis MDCXII*), are usually used as proof that the complex structure of arsenal with the storage area and the theater was indeed finished during the rule of Semitecolo. The hypothesis was first propounded by the famous local historian, Grgo Novak (1961). It was questioned subsequently (Kolumbić Šćepanović, 2020, Čavić, 2022). Nevertheless, it has remained part of the local historical knowledge although the construction of the theater must have continued after 1612 (see: <https://min-kulture.gov.hr/vijesti-8/hvarsko-kazaliste-16894/16894>, accessed February 20, 2024).

instigation and with material support of the local Theater Society founded in 1800 (Kolumbić Šćepanović, 2020).

The year inscribed above the entrance door to the theatre – 1612, which allegedly marks its opening, has become a unique year in the history of the town. It bears a twofold symbolic value: on the one hand, it marks the end of the strife between local nobility and the rising bourgeoisie (“the second year of the peace”), and, on the other, Semitecolo’s visionary decision to mitigate century-long class strife by opening up the theater to all social groups regardless of their class, economic, or other differences (Kolumbić Šćepanović, 2020). The idea that the Hvar theater boasts the title of the first public (open to everybody) theater in Europe is firmly embedded in the collective memory of the residents. An interlocutor, who is also a tourist guide in the town claims that “the Hvar residents quiver after their theater”, meaning that the theater is not only a historical monument or cultural heritage, but that it is an identity marker and a vital building in the life of the locals, for which there are deep emotions. This is confirmed by the local art historian, Mirjana Kolumbić Šćepanović (2020: 21). So important is the year of the theater’s alleged opening in the local cultural memory, that it is used in the name of the recently established municipal institution of culture, Javna ustanova u kulturi Hvar 1612 (Public Institution of Culture Hvar, 1612).⁴

The material legacies of the past have been transferred to the current people of Hvar. Our interlocutors were familiar with the year 1612 and the events that preceded and followed it. They underlined the fact that the Venetian governor Semitecolo managed to (re)build some of the most important buildings in the town in only three years of his rule, among them the first public theater in Europe. “It took Semitecolo only two years to do it!” stressed an interlocutor. Another one was of the opinion that the construction of the theater is “to this date the last big structural project in the town with societal and cultural connotations” (oral communication).⁵ He added, “If I were the mayor, I would write the inscription *anno secundo pacis*, 1612 in gold.”

The significance of the arsenal and the theater for the residents of Hvar was recognized by the architect Tomislav Krajina, the author of a renovation project in 2009. The architect said “There is no doubt that the arsenal is the largest space in Hvar, but not only in terms of physical dimensions but also in terms of its historical and semantic nature. More than ‘in Hvar’, we could say ‘it is Hvar!’” (Bibić, 2015).⁶

4 See: <https://min-kulture.gov.hr/vijesti-8/hvarsko-kazaliste-16894/16894> (accessed February 20, 2024); <https://hvar1612.hr/o-ustanovi/> (accessed March 12, 2024).

5 This comment indirectly criticizes both former and current municipal leaders for their failure to undertake any new projects that are crucial for society, such as the development of a sports and medical center or an elderly care facility.

6 <http://pogledaj.to/arhitektura/obnovljeni-arsenal-srediste-kulturnog-i-drustvenog-zivota-hvara/> (accessed on March 12, 2024)

The arsenal, the theater, and the loggia underwent thorough sanitation, restoration, and revitalization⁷ in the past two decades. The endeavors in the arsenal spanned nearly two decades and encompassed various tasks such as constructive strengthening, archaeological excavations, conservation, and reconstruction as well as interpolations, interior design, and equipping. They took a decade in the theater, while the loggia was restored in less than a decade. The processes were managed by the Conservation Department of the Ministry of Culture in Split.⁸ The buildings were reopened between 2019 and 2021. In addition to the immeasurable symbolic value of the theater for the local community, its significance for the national cultural heritage is such that its re-opening on 2nd May 2019 was attended by high-ranked politicians.⁹

The renovations have divided the experts.¹⁰ Disagreements among experts over which method to apply, preservation (respecting what is found) or restoration (adding parts that existed in different developmental phases) and interpolation (adding new elements) (*Standardi i kriteriji...*, 2023) suggest that the renovation of cultural monuments with the vision of their modernizing for contemporary usage is inherently contentious (cf. Smith, 2006). Also, within the expert heritage discourse, in Croatia at least, there is dissonance. On the background of these opposite views arising within the profession, the following section presents the dissonant reactions by non-experts, the users that act in their overlapping roles of everyday users, managers (municipality), users for tourist profit, and/or social critics (artists).

Different Stakeholders' Views About Cultural Heritage

1. Musealization vs. Factory of Culture

In the spring of 2021, city employees proudly showed us newly opened cultural monuments, the arsenal, theater, loggia, and *leroj*. It is obvious that they were satisfied with what they had done. They pointed out that they were guided by a double idea: that historical, cultural monuments remain part of the living town tissue, that is, that

7 The use of terms relating to the conservation of cultural monuments appears inconsistent in Croatia. I have more or less followed the definitions published in: *Standardi i kriteriji za izradu konzervatorskih podloga za kulturno-povijesne cjeline gradskih obilježja* (2022: 41-43). Since it is not important to differentiate between expert conservation terms in this article, I frequently use the generic term “renovation” for different kinds of conservation practices.

8 More detail about decisions taken during the conservation and restoration processes can be found in: Gamulin 2014, <https://www.topohvar.at/topo/orte/hv/hv-tg-04-1/> and in the speech held by Radoslav Buzančić, the chief curator of the Regional conservation office of the Ministry of Culture and Media in Split (<https://min-kulture.gov.hr/vijesti-8/hvarsko-kazaliste-16894/16894>) (accessed March 10, 2024).

9 (<https://min-kulture.gov.hr/vijesti-8/hvarsko-kazaliste-16894/16894>; accessed March 10, 2024).

10 Due to limitations of space, I cannot go into details of these controversies.

they are used for social purposes on the one hand, and that, on the other, as a tourist resource they will contribute to redirecting tourism in the town.

In fact, successive local authorities¹¹ were guided by a threefold vision of cultural heritage: the preservation of its symbolic values (the fundamental idea of heritage), its life and functions in everyday life (societal function of heritage), and its potential as an economic resource (touristic, instrumental value of heritage) (cf. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Therefore, they decided to adapt the interior spaces to modern standards and multiple purposes and needs of residents. The attempt to restore historical heritage to be more than its museological presentation, i.e., to use it for social purposes by reconciling different values and possible functions of buildings has led to conflicts between heritage fashioners (curators, experts) and the municipal powers as well as between the latter and the ordinary users of these places.

The municipal leaders complained about the restrictions imposed on them by curators, who insisted on the use of old materials. This led to some solutions that are supposedly problematic because they prevent the object from being brought into modern function. One of the municipal leaders said that by their requests, which are led by the idea that the end result of the renovation will primarily be a “museum,” curators are “extremely hindering development.” For example, the curators required that oak planks be used in the loggia, which made the entire process more costly and lengthy: “Oak planks cost a lot. (...). Instead, we could have easily put a concrete slab and glued it with oak (...), and nobody would know anything! This would be much better than making museum spaces, which are not functional” (former municipal leader, oral communication). In a similar vein, the theater was restored with original wooden constructions between the floors; the two rows of boxes are also wooden. Allegedly, this solution that respects the historical materials is precluding loud concerts that generate vibrations from being held on the ground floor of the arsenal. Some interlocutors from the municipality share different opinions on this fact. One thinks that this is not a problem since, in any case, “not everything should be staged in the arsenal” (oral communication, see below). That same interlocutor also judged that the collaboration with curators was excellent and that it is not true that they are only interested in turning historic buildings into museums. This opinion is confirmed by their acceptance of the introduction of modern elements into the arsenal and the theater.

The arsenal was renovated for multi-purpose facilities, which it had served before the renovation.¹² Besides the theater, the upper hall, used for council meetings, lectures and exhibitions, was also renovated.

In the few years since its opening, the arsenal has hosted various exhibitions, lectures, carnival events, fairs and exhibitions of wine and island products, forums

11 Oral communication by a town's employee at the time of the beginning of the renovations.

12 The arsenal was a storage room, a gym, a cinema hall, an event hall, and on the first floor next to the theater there were municipal offices and a gallery.



Photo 4.: The inside of the theater, Hvar. Author: Jasna Čapo.

on state-assisted construction of apartments, charitable events or receptions for the entire population during certain community events. In the summer, exhibitions intended not only for locals but also for visitors are held. In the tourist season, the theater primarily functions as a representative heritage site, while in the off-season, it hosts theatrical performances of domestic and guest theater companies, concerts, competitions of high school students in knowledge, gala events, scientific symposia, etc. The theater appears to be the most appropriate venue for local cultural events in winter, “a place of encounter”, since it is equipped and heated.

Both spaces are, therefore, in a dual function: a tourist resource and a “living room” for citizens on different occasions. The duality of life introduced by tourism seasonality (Čapo, 2022) is clearly reflected in the use of heritage: in the season, these spaces function as touristic assets, in themselves and as display areas; outside of the season, starting sometime in late September and finishing in May, they are primarily used for local sociability and events. The double heritage use, thus, mirrors the double life of the Hvar residents. At the moment, the use of the arsenal with the theater for community purposes outweighs its touristic consumption.

The three iconic heritage buildings, the arsenal, the theater, the loggia (and a few others), are under the jurisdiction of the Public Institution of Culture Hvar 1612, whose mission is to manage them but also to promote them as main venues for

cultural and artistic events in the town.¹³ As explained by the director, in addition to protecting/curating and presenting historical monuments of the town, the Institution aims at “bringing in cultural contents into monuments” and educating young people (oral communication). By “excellent and culturally innovative” contents that rely on the “rich historical heritage of the town of Hvar”, the Institution and its director want to transform cultural/historical heritage into a “factory of culture.” With the help of young and creative forces, the Institution is imagined by its director as “a creator of new energy in the town” (oral communication). This vision of cultural production in historical monuments (culture as lived practice) rather than just consuming them as objects to be admired (culture as heritage) or exploiting them for touristic purposes (culture industry, cf. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998) marks the continuation of community-oriented management of historical heritage in the town.

2. Heritage Work as Social Process

Residents have enthusiastically welcomed the renovation of the buildings and their return to the community for use. Their comments refer to a lesser extent to the aesthetic result of the renovations, and much more to the functions of buildings and some changes in appearance that affect their use. Their opinions testify to the important place of these buildings in the local symbolic imaginary but also to their role in the social life of residents in the past. For example, for the generation of the Hvar natives born in the 1980s and 1990s, the theater was considered their “home” as the local drama studio had rehearsals in the theater, and as young people, they “grew up on that scene” before its closure some twenty years ago. It is probably for this reason that an interlocutor regretted that the renovated theater is not an “alive house,” i.e., that productions do not take place there: “I really feel sorry because our theater is not a working theater, it does not produce. (...). The vibe that an alive house has... it is more attractive to come and see it. As it is now, it is a beautiful space for performing, which is empty, without a soul. Life needs to be introduced into it.”

Older generations speak about the arsenal or the loggia in the same way. Talking about the importance of the arsenal as the movie venue in his youth, a man born in the early 1960s explained that “a movie is just a means, cinema is an institution. Going to the cinema is not going to see a movie, it’s something else. You call someone and meet and agree whether we will go to the cinema. It’s the same as going for coffee, socializing, going out.” For him and his generation, the arsenal used to be the focal point of the town’s social life, the center of the town’s livelihood. For a somewhat younger woman, the employee of the municipality, the loggia had such a function: “I’m never going to like this new loggia because I spent my life in the old one. I’ve danced on that floor a hundred times, exhibitions, lectures, dancing... The new one

13 <https://hvar1612.hr/> (accessed March 10, 2024)

may be a hundred times better, but I don't like it," she said just after the opening of the renewed loggia.¹⁴

The residents, who are primarily in the role of placeusers, express most dissent regarding the entrance arch to the arsenal. In the process of the latest renovation, this first arch, which had been opened during the renovation in the 1950s, was closed. Residents think it was the idea of the curators, but according to town officials, the town, together with the curators, agreed to close the first arch, so as not to reduce the interior space of the arsenal. There were some plans to make that part into a "city reception" and a "visitor center" (oral communication).

After the renovation that had taken place in the 1950s, for several generations of Hvar residents the open arched space of the arsenal became a gathering place, place for queuing for movie tickets and chatting. It was the space where men were meeting to comment on daily politics or taking shelter in the rain. This is where "in a word, they lived", said an interlocutor. One of the interlocutors said that with it "Hvar got another loggia. All our lives, my generation had that front loggia open. When there was a storm, when the wind was beating there, and the sea was pouring over, you stand inside there, you enjoy watching, you hide, you chat, you watch the storm, but you are sheltered." In addition to the building in the northern part of the main square (the *loggia*), which was historically erected as a place for meeting and discussing communal problems, and later used as a café and reading room, with the opening of the first arched space of the arsenal in the 1950s, the inhabitants of the town got another such place, where they acquired the habit of being and spending time. It was a place where the "real life" of the inhabitants took place (cf. Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Through their use, the meaning and value of these monuments for residents was born. One elderly interlocutor, also a tourist guide, excellently summed up the double significance of historical monuments for the community: "Outside of tourism there is life. What I am trying to say is that historical monuments that are presented as heritage are simply dead monuments if they do not serve something, (...) if they are not part of the life of the people of Hvar." The first arch of the arsenal was definitely such a vital part of social life for an older generation of the Hvar residents.

When discussing the meaning of these monuments for them, people refer to "heritage work" that cultural monuments undergo and in which they become intangible heritage (Smith, 2006). Through their use in everyday life of the community, they create shared (generational) memories and associations by which they acquire an additional heritage value and meaning for the residents. Through the processes of meaning-making the residents appropriate the cultural monuments as their own heritage (cf. Lowenthal, 1998: 25). An interlocutor said: "My generation owned that space. So now, we have a feeling that we have practically lost everything, the feeling that nothing is ours any more" (underlined by the interlocutor). These words express

14 Three years later, the lady has become accustomed to the loggia's new look, and she seems utterly satisfied!

identification with that particular part of the building; through its use that area has become the “property” of the locals, as an interlocutor said. In the process of renovation, some errors were committed “which do not coincide with the will of the people who will use the buildings tomorrow”. Residents thus express concern that they were not consulted during the renovation, that their point of view was not taken into account. No wonder, that the entire community has been “humming for years about the renovation”, because the city fathers turned a deaf ear to their opinions.¹⁵ The municipal employees, in their capacity as both the placeusers and the placemanagers are aware of these remarks. According to them, it would be impossible to respect the residents’ opinions since they are not uniform. On the other hand, they affirm that their “heart and emotions” also beat for their town and its heritage, and that they have made all renovation decisions to the best of their knowledge.

Residents’ relation to heritage is also experiential. They talk about the structurally important detail in the renovation when the step at the entrance to the arsenal was removed: “Certain curators in an office have made that decision... they built the leaning entrance. There used to be a step so that the sea does not enter the interior during storms. And now, every time the sea is rough it comes in” (whistle). Placeusers have an experiential and embodied knowledge of the building, unlike those “certain curators in an office”, whose knowledge is theoretical and from afar. Placeusers, therefore, criticize the lack of the heritage curators’ understanding of real circumstances and the life that goes on in the place.¹⁶ By these critiques they also lament the lack of civic participation in the restoration decisions.¹⁷

3. Heritage as Property that Awakens Piety vs. Heritage for Touristic Consumption

Some of the residents’ concerns about the use of newly renovated buildings resonate with Lowenthal’s (1998: 1) observation that “heritage awakens piety the world over”. Residents are concerned whether the renovated buildings, in their role as iconic cultural heritage, should be used for certain events, or whether while deciding on their use, one should “safeguard their dignity” (oral communication). An interlocutor, who was not alone in his opinion, expressed concern about what is “appropriate” or even what should be “allowed” to be staged “in one of the oldest theaters in Europe”, in Hvar, “the cradle of culture and scenic art. We should have a certain level.” Another resident criticizes the current uses of the ground floor of the arsenal: “It is used for

15 Residents’ wishes to actively participate in municipal decisions that relate to the aesthetics of their town is also visible in numerous critical comments about the new illumination in the town.

16 It should be noted that municipal employees are aware of the problem with the sea entering the building.

17 Critical heritage studies underline the necessity to take into account the local community as the primary stakeholder in tangible heritage preservation (Deacon, Smeets, 2013; Jameson, 2016; Trelka, 2020). Unfortunately, the local community was left out of the renovation processes in Hvar.

weddings. Instead of bringing in culture, we had a wine exhibition the other day. (...) It is a disgrace to have a promotion of wines or rent the space for lavish dinners in a historical monument.” Instead, he has ideas about a virtual museum that would attract visitors and capitalize on this unique historical space.¹⁸ An interlocutor, who is both a user of these spaces and a town employee, also thinks that “one should have a measure, not all spaces should be used for everything.”

The use of public space in front of the renovated historical buildings is also controversial. An interlocutor, who is also a former town employee, thinks that the wooden huts and the stage for public concerts that the town arranges for the Christmas market in front of the loggia, are a “catastrophe”: “I do not like this stage in front, and the sticky floor, all this in front of such a building. It makes me want to cry. All of this kills totally the loggia.” Another inhabitant thinks the same and recounts what he calls “a radical event” some twenty years ago when a famous Croatian rock group was supposed to play in front of the loggia: “This is music that is absolutely not meant for the spaces in Hvar. (...) The group had a concert in front of the loggia. This is the only time in history that the musicians themselves interrupted their own concert after twenty minutes, apologized to the public, and left. Because they realized that their music was inappropriate for that space!”

Uses of the large public space of the main square, *Pjaca*, are also subject to disagreements in opinions. A huge town square (4,500m²), surrounded by iconic buildings that connect the two parts of the city, is a very important space for various forms of sociability of residents: children play here; on three steps that separate it into two levels, young people sit after school; in front of the church women stop and chat after mass; in cafés on the north side people hang out over coffee; it is also a ritual space over which town fraternities pass in processions or where the central parts of liturgical and paraliturgical festivities such as the Good Friday processions or the procession on St. Stephen’s Day are held (the patron saint of the diocese). The square is also a stage for various other events: so-called Millenium photographs organized by a Croatian photographer, exhibits of old wooden boats of the Mediterranean in the little port on the western end, a Christmas market in front of the loggia, a skating rink in the winter months, etc.

The old communal well (*gustirna*) from the sixteenth century is located centrally on the square. Until 1950s, it provided water to the residents. Once it lost its original function, it “has become a meeting spot, as well as one of the most important urban monuments.” It has also become a most frequent motif of “landscapes and postcards” (oral communication). Today it is the most photographed cultural monument in Hvar, with the cathedral in the background. It was built to be visible from all standpoints on the square.

With the touristification of the locality, the traditional Mediterranean lifestyle of inhabiting the open public space (cf. Braudel, 1997) has been changing due to the

¹⁸ This does not exhaust the residents’ ideas about the use of the ground floor.

changes in its use. For example, in the summer of 2023 the main square served as a decor for a spectacle organized by the Tourist Board of the town.¹⁹ With the aim to popularize outdoor tourism and extend the tourist season, the Tourist Board also organizes a tournament in basketball, a half marathon, and the Spartan Sprint World Championship, all of which will have the large square as a backdrop.²⁰ Occupied by the hospitality sector and commercialized for the purpose of tourism, access to public spaces, especially to the large square and the nearby narrow streets in the old center, is severely reduced in the summer months. The well on the main square gets surrounded by tables and chairs on the open-air terraces of hospitality establishments. Despite the regulations related to the hospitality industry, which aim to limit the privatization of public areas, restaurateurs occupy a large part of the public area of *Pjaca* and other parts of the city in the summer months. Although the town's regulations stipulate that cultural monuments should not be concealed by catering activities, the municipal fathers do not respect their own regulations allowing more and more lenient permits for the spreading out of restaurants. Residents claim the town has been “invaded” and “seized” by tourists – with good reason. The “occupation” of public spaces in certain parts of the town is so aggressive that the town well disappears from sight in summer months²¹ while the function of *Pjaca* as the meeting place and public life is lost (oral communication and observation).

According to locals, the visiting partygoers are responsible for the most damaging effects of tourism: they disturb inhabitants' lifestyles and represent what they feel is a direct threat to their habits and quality of life. These visitors are numerous and typically very noisy. When inebriated, they exhibit rowdy behavior as they stagger down local streets and often offend residents' sensibilities with displays of indecent behavior deemed “disrespectful” of locals and the locality. The problem is further aggravated by entrepreneurs from the hospitality sector who respond to the increasing demand generated by young partygoers by staging loud open-air parties in bars or on beaches, thereby further infringing upon public spaces and violating regulations regarding the permissible amount of public space (and noise) that can be

19 In summer 2023, the town of Hvar hosted a spectacular event powered by Rimac Bugatti and Europa-Park. The spectacle promoting a future area in Europa Park dedicated to Croatia was preceded by a weeks-long display of Nevera, an electric vehicle produced by Rimac Bugatti (Croatia) and venerated as “the fastest all-electric vehicle in the world” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G12-QhbVbOmW>). While the Tourist Board of Hvar rhetorically asked if there can be “a more stylish addition to the already exclusive Hvar main square” (<https://visithvar.hr/>, accessed March 10, 2024), the Hvar residents had dissenting views about the display. Some were enthusiastic, some indifferent. A person, who otherwise was enchanted by the spectacle organized by Europa Park, cynically said that she thought that looking at the electric car, that stood in a specially constructed box in front of the arsenal, was like looking into “the golden calf” (sic!).

20 See: <https://visithvar.hr/> (accessed April 19, 2024). There are concerned opinions that these uses are devaluating the square and its beauty.

21 Indeed, in the summer of 2022, I passed through the town square without even noticing the well that stood amid numerous restaurant tables.

utilized by their businesses. Local entrepreneurs thus directly contribute to the detrimental effects of mass party tourism (Čapo, 2023).

The sheer physical smallness of the town, particularly its compact old center, populated with iconic cultural landmarks, as well as its well-preserved historical ambiance, are crucial in accentuating the impact of over-tourism. Most tourists are drawn to precisely these areas of the town due to their historical significance. Moreover, they are essential for visitors to explore since it is along the charming narrow stone streets that the hospitality industry thrives. In such a small town, the presence of tourists is ubiquitous, leading to friction with the few residents who still reside in its center and are forced to navigate streets cluttered with tables and chairs from bars and restaurants. Coupled with the seasonal nature of tourism, the town's size and the centralization of service activities undoubtedly exacerbate the problems resulting from excessive tourism. Each year, particularly during the tourist season, complaints and conflicts over public spaces and effects of tourism on the quality of life grow increasingly bitter. The conflicts arise between different kinds of placeusers but mainly between those who also use the spaces for touristic purposes and those who do not, as well as the placeusers without tourist stakes and the municipality, whom the first blame for lack of control over tourism in the town.

4. Artistic Critique of the Uses of Heritage

In order to problematize the fact that more and more public spaces are commercialized in the service of tourism, the Hvar Heritage Museum and the Town of Hvar have organized several exhibitions of local artists. Wanting to put an emphasis on “disappearing public spaces”,²² in the summer of 2022, they placed art installations in the town (the project *HvarUrbArt*). The exhibits directly warn of the disappearance of Mediterranean traditions and lifestyles under the onslaught of uncontrolled tourism and profit-making. They also criticize a trend in which the town is threatened to become “the backdrop of an amusement park for tourists” (oral communication) or a *non-lieu* according to Marc Augé. The controversy and tension between the desire for profit and the sustainability of the local way of life, heritage and traditions have inspired most of the individual works of art.²³

With two installations jointly signed by the HvarUrbArt team, a bench called “The Place of Encounter” (*Misto susreta*) placed in front of the arsenal and the wrapping of the well (*gustirna*) on the main town square, the municipality administration reviewed its own decisions and (in)action. By wrapping the well (inspired by the world-famous wrapping of city historical landmarks by Christo), the aim was to critically reflect on the use of the public area of the *Pjaca* for private catering purposes

²² Hvar Heritage Museum, FB posts in the summer of 2022 and oral communication.

²³ Unfortunately, the catalogue of the exhibition has not been published. Information about individual exhibits can be found on the Museum's FB in the summer of 2022.

on the one hand, and, on the other, to self-critically review the municipality's decisions allowing it while at the same time violating regulations. A town employee described *gustirna* as a contentious subject for everyone, while also acknowledging its symbolic significance as a representation of both resistance and capitulation. The bench which was installed in front of the arsenal building, directly alluded to the dissatisfaction of residents caused by the closure of their favorite meeting spot on rainy and windy days (see above). The town authorities know that the decision to exempt that space from public use caused a storm of dissatisfaction among the residents. In a symbolic way, with the installation named "The Place of Encounter" the HvarUrbArt team wanted to give them back their place for meetings, at least temporarily.

Both installations sparked widespread discussion. A lively debate developed on Facebook that indicated that residents did not understand what the wrapping of the well was about; the same was confirmed to me in direct contact.²⁴ It also raised the question whether the authorities are "crazy" because they criticize their own decisions. They may also be hypocritical, one resident said. One of the interlocutors thought that the wrapping of the well had just prompted the expansion of restaurants into the public space; and that a more appropriate protest would be to gather children and residents on the "occupied" areas and disrupt the hospitality establishments' work. Ironically commenting on the bench, the same interlocutor said: "They just put it there, and two drunk partygoers sat down, stretching those pizzas and drinking two liters of beer. I said, 'Well, you did offer them a place to meet.'"

With art installations around the town, the organizers and artists aimed at a critical social commentary on the negative consequences of extreme touristification of the town, on the instrumental use of the entire town as well as cultural monuments as an economic resource, and thus on the disappearance of the familiar way of life and habits of citizens in the tourist season. One municipal official remarked that the effects of the economic exploitation of cultural heritage in the town are pronounced because all residents are, at the same time, users of public spaces and entrepreneurs who make money on them. They are "losers" in the first role and "winners" in the second, she said. That placeusers' ambiguity, I would agree, is a key point for understanding the controversies and the unsolvable tensions that arise in the town over the use of protected cultural monuments and open space ambiances. With the exhibition, the curator aimed to point out the need to "reconcile the desire for profit and maintain the life of the community" (oral communication). Concerned about safeguarding the "dignity" of public spaces, another town employee thought that profit should be restricted if it requires the use of public space (also see above). She believes that the use of the town's public spaces as a backdrop for various events with the purpose of tourist promotion will lead to an ever-increasing amount of inadequate content organized in the town, more specifically in the main square.

24 FB discussions in the group Stare razglednice Hvara, summer 2022.

Although by participating in art installations, the town administration operates only on a symbolic level, it has made an unusual step forward in the direction of acknowledging its own mistakes (because during the renovation of an important heritage building, they did not consult citizens or enable their participation in decision-making), its own inconsistencies and inefficiency in safeguarding the order. It is actually acknowledging its impotence in the face of excessive tourism that seriously endangers their town. This is a modest but still important step toward empowering the town government to do something concrete and effective to protect residents and the town from the unintended consequences of uncontrolled tourist expansion.

Heritage Cacophony on the Ground

Based on in-depth ethnographic research the article has provided detailed insights into social processes that surround heritage discourses and practices in a community in which heritage is still part of everyday life. It has pointed out an undeniably important symbolic place of material cultural heritage in Hvar and among its residents. It is derived from historical events in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and validated by experts' valorization and protection of cultural monuments that were built as a result of those past events. The analysis shows that historical monuments have a special value for residents because of their material and symbolic importance for group identity. Additionally, these monuments have gained value through their historical and current use in the town's social life. This intangible value is considered more important by the residents than the value assigned to them by heritage experts. From this basic incongruity follow dissonant evaluations of the renovations executed on three iconic buildings in the town. The dissonance was exacerbated by the fact that the local community *did not* participate in the renovation decisions.

Further sources of conflict over heritage stem from the incongruity of the locals and their agendas. The local community is a *heterogeneous stakeholder* with concurrent yet opposing treatments of cultural heritage – as a cultural value and identity marker and as a profit-generating resource in tourist agendas. Beyond those symbolic and instrumental meanings and uses of heritage, Hvar, in which heritage is still part of everyday culture, demonstrates the importance of its societal and experiential meanings. Additionally, due to excessive touristic developments, heritage also becomes an object of critical artistic commentary. The clashes caused by these various views on heritage are particularly conspicuous since the locals act in several roles simultaneously.

Professional (expert) art historians and curators attribute heritage value and meaning based on formal aesthetic criteria; these are employed in its protection, conservation, renovation, and public display. They did not even agree on the most

appropriate way of renovating and presenting cultural monuments. Then, there are non-expert stakeholders who inscribe all the above-mentioned meanings and values to cultural heritage as they use it in their everyday life. Due to their overlapping roles in the community – as ordinary users and consumers, as users who also act as municipal employees and leaders and/or artists, and as those who instrumentalize heritage assets for touristic purposes, the locals appear to be a mixed crowd, sharing some and/or prioritizing certain meanings and uses of heritage over others. Their heterogeneous voices introduce additional dissonance, one may even say cacophony in heritage matters. These dissenting uses of heritage result in tensions and controversies, especially over the privatization of public space by the hospitality sector and the (mis)uses of cultural monuments for tourist industry.

The users who are also in charge of the managing and use of heritage (placemanagers) maneuver between these different narratives and practices of heritage. Lead by a triple vision of safeguarding heritage for its own sake and bringing it both to public (municipal) and touristic functions, their position is rather vulnerable in relation to all other stakeholders. First, their ideas may collide with those of heritage experts. Second, although their ideas for future use of heritage coincide with those of other residents, by not taking into account their wishes, especially their close and emotionally charged relationship to the past uses of cultural monuments, they made renovation decisions that caused dissatisfaction among residents. Third, by their half-hearted implementation of the municipal order with which they should be controlling the appropriation of public spaces for private profits (by placeusers who instrumentalize heritage for private goals), and, moreover, by committing breaches in the order themselves, the municipal leadership have an extremely ambivalent stance in the community.

Last but not least, some placeusers also act as artists. Their role in heritage struggles has been to critically comment on the commercialization of public spaces and the touristification of the town. Artistic interventions in public spaces were joined by a couple of installations that the municipality added in an attempt to critically reflect on its own renovation decisions and lack of assertiveness in keeping order locally. It is not entirely clear that this reached out to the residents nor that it represents a move toward the placeusers' future participation in municipal decisions.

Beyond a nuanced, ethnographically grounded understanding of the dynamics and complexity of the production of cultural heritage locally, the article may inspire a reflection about the limits of local community engagement in heritage work more generally. Since the community is a contentious rather than a monovocal actor (even such a small community as Hvar), involving it in the heritage decision-making may be quite a tedious process. This is not the reason for disconnecting them from the heritage processes (or any other municipal processes). However, knowing this may require painstaking and lasting capacity building among the locals. If the Hvar case were further taken as instructive, the capacity building toward an active and engaged community should include some important tenets of social life, such as that the

common good and respect of legal provisions take priority over private interests and agendas.

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