

Art in the Community : Heritage and New Collaborative Practices

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Source / Izvornik: **Ethnologia Fennica, 2021, 48, 56 - 77**

Journal article, Published version

Rad u časopisu, Objavljena verzija rada (izdavačev PDF)

<https://doi.org/10.23991/ef.v48i1.101739>

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:131:036941>

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Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2024-08-30**



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Art in the Community Heritage and New Collaborative Practices

Abstract

This article discusses the culture-making and place-making initiatives created at the intersection of ethnology and cultural anthropology, art and cultural politics. The focus is on the ways in which joint ethnological and artistic involvement can change the dynamics within the local community. As a case study, the authors use the project *Art in the Community: Redefining Heritage of the Association of Artists 'Zemlja'* (Croatia, 2018 – 2020). The project was based on naïve art and educational work of a renowned painter Krsto Hegedušić. In the locality where Hegedušić had worked and found inspiration – Hlebine – contemporary artists rethought his heritage and brought it to life. The project included local naïve artists from Hlebine and students of Visual Arts and Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology from Zagreb. The text analyses the potentials and challenges in working with different stakeholders on the region's cultural scene who take part in the project in order to affirm, negotiate, or re-define their culture-building strategies.

Keywords: community-engaged art, participative approaches, Hlebine, Krsto Hegedušić

Introduction: Voice and Agency in Ethnography and Art

For decades now, “giving voice” to people whose culture we study has served as one of the most frequently revisited imperatives in the making of ethnological and anthropological theory and practice (cf. Appadurai 1988). It does not go without controversies, especially when the concept is related to power relations between the researcher and the researched, and to the problem of “speaking for/of/with” the localized “other”, especially in the case of socially and economically deprived, vulnerable, and marginalized groups. The dilemma stems from the question of how researchers can make their fieldwork truly participatory and work *together* with the groups they write about if they approach them from academic heights, i.e. if they translate their findings about culture to “the elite language of the socially and culturally privileged” – to anthropological definitions and terms (Bhabha 1994, 18). To which extent can they make research results applicable and beneficial to individuals and groups they work with? In which ways can they contribute to positive changes within the communities? Finally, how can researchers define what a positive societal change is when faced with a heterogeneity of voices, interests, positions, and attitudes in the field?

In Croatian ethnology, the issue of giving voice to culture builders is connected with the beginnings of its institutionalized history, although the call for an active participation of researched communities in research process emerged from a different political and social background and had a different agenda from the current postcolonial anthropological preoccupations. At the end of the 19th century, Stjepan Radić, defined as the founder of the discipline in Croatia, initiated an all-encompassing action of gathering ethnographic data on peasant way of life. The goal of the project, which had clear nation-building aspirations, was to tackle the question of social equality and justice, that is, to point to the value of folk/peasant culture and to contribute to reconciliation of diverse strata of Croatian society (Radić 1897, 12–13). For Radić, an ideal ethnographer was an insider, a literate peasant; ethnography was supposed to *give voice* to people that actually lived the culture (Čapo Žmegač 1995, 32). The purpose of science, as Radić saw it, was to seek truth, but not only in order to know it, but also to use it (Radić 1897, 11). In his view, ethnography’s applied component draws from its potential to provide marginalized groups – in this case peasants – with agency and turn them into active actors on the historical scene, able to change their social circumstances.

The idea of reverting the social hierarchy and top-down canon of knowledge production was at the core of another socially engaged platform initiated three decades after Radić’s call for the recognition of rural culture and emancipation of peasants – the one associated with art. Croatian renowned painter Krsto

Hegedušić was in a similar quest for a genuine folk expression as a source of collective distinctiveness when he established the Hlebine School, a group that relied on the work of peasant-artists without formal artistic education (Prelog 2016, 34). Hegedušić's initiative attempted to be reciprocal: folk art was not treated solely as a source of inspiration, but also as a resource for those close to traditional forms and a means for peasants to improve their economic and social circumstances. The legacy of the Association of Artists *Zemlja*, based on Hegedušić's political and stylistic frameworks, has inspired a research-artistic project that is in our focus. *Art in the Community: Redefining Heritage of the Association of Artists 'Zemlja'* project transposes ideas of the Zemlja Association to the contemporary setting and explores strategies by which participatory artistic and ethnographic approaches can facilitate positive social change (Flajsig, Zanki, and Škrbić Alempijević 2020). The community highlighted in the project's title encompasses the inhabitants of Hlebine, a village in northern Croatia situated near the Drava river, from which Hegedušić originated. Nowadays, this place with some 1.300 inhabitants, whose economy is based on agriculture and food processing industry, has been known as the cradle of Croatian naïve art.

The project was carried out in collaboration of the Croatian Society of Fine Artists, the Academy of Fine Arts and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb, with local agents and cultural institutions, primarily with the Gallery of Naïve Art in Hlebine, in 2019 and 2020.¹ It aimed at putting the theoretical concepts and approaches to anthropology of art in practice. By understanding art as a cultural system (Geertz 1983), the project participants recognized its potential to reflect, but also transform the current social context. That potential stems from the connection between art and agency, based on which artwork can extend the capacity of their makers and users to act independently, make their own choices, and improve quality of life and their present-day circumstances (Gell 1998). Accordingly, the project's focus was on the ways in which joint ethnological and artistic involvement can change the dynamics within the local community, and make them more visible, integrated, and better connected with other influential agents within artistic networks. The aim of this article is to present and analyze the culture-making and place-making initiatives triggered by the project and created at the intersection of ethnology and cultural anthropology, art, and local cultural politics.

The new cultural production was based on the transfer of knowledge, skills, and experiences in artwork among different project stakeholders. Project teams

1 The project was curated by Josip Zanki and Maja Flajsig in the frame of the *CreArt: Network of Cities for Artistic Creation* international project.

included local naïve artists, students of Visual Arts and students of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, whose aim was to draw from local heritage and naïve art tradition to create innovative artwork and present their results to different audiences, locally and nationally. The emphasis was placed on the artistic process rather than on the final products. One of the project's missions was to relinquish hierarchical one-way relationships between experts from Academia and local artists. In their social interaction, all the projects participants were in a learning situation while testing new materials or techniques and mastering teamwork competency. That exchange of knowledge and ideas took place between individuals, but also between associations and institutions, i.e., in a complex web of social agents (Škrbić Alempijević 2020, 17).

Ethnologists and cultural anthropologists play an important role in that process. Our task in the project was both to conduct research and to stimulate participation and collaboration among diverse agents: artists and other local inhabitants, students, representatives of institutions, and policy makers.² We focused on the interaction between the various actors during the artistic process. The main point of our interest was the interrelation of artists' practice and everyday life in that area. We observed the stimuli, perception and effects of artistic projects in the local community. Our research findings aimed to serve as guidelines for decision-makers as to how to treat heritage related to naïve art within the local community, not only as a petrified and fixed reminder of its significant past, but also as a part of the everyday life of present-day inhabitants and an impulse for some future creative processes in Hlebine.

Requisition

On September 29, 2018, Maja Flajsig and Josip Zanki visited Hlebine. Going to that, what later turned out to be, first fieldwork, came at the initiative of Maja Flajsig, who visited painter Stipan Tadić, a participant in the *HINT* residence in Hlebine in May of the same year. It was his residency that was the first impulse to revive Krsto Hegedušić's ideas, but also to continue the almost vanished tradition of naïve art of the Hlebine School, which will be shaped in the art research project *Art in the Community: Redefining Heritage of the Association of Artists 'Zemlja'*. Stipan Tadić was invited to the residency by art historian Helena Kušenić from the Gallery of Naïve Art in Hlebine, which operates within the Museum of the City of Koprivnica. Within the residence, Stipan Tadić was to get acquainted with the heritage, significance and technique of Hlebine naïve art. It was during his stay in Hlebine that he learned

2 All the participants of the project have given a permission to the Authors to use their full names in this text.

the traditional technique of painting on glass, which is regularly associated with him. The village itself was placed strongly on the artistic map of the country (Karadorđević Kingdom) by the activities of an arts collective, the Zemlja Association (1929 – 1935). Krsto Hegedušić was the founder of that group, a political prisoner, but also the initiator of the first project of socially engaged artistic practice, inspired by the ideas of social justice and equality, and based on fieldwork, not only in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia but also in Europe.

One of the first paintings made by Stipan Tadić in the technique of oil on glass, *Ovrha* (2018), shows a modern enforcement (very similar to forced collection of livestock and grain), a family that will be evicted from their home, while the embodiment of modern Moloch observes them from the clouds, a demonized authorized bailiff (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 7).

Peter Sloterdijk very accurately describes the wickedly smiling mouth of a powerful cynic and adds that the powerful man looks at his gain, even when he knows that he is reaching morally dubious positions, and from his distorted superiority a distorted smile, a malicious gesture, easily emerges. It was such a smile that illuminated the face of the gentleman's cynic, Tadić's bailiff, the one who stems from the desire to preserve his cheek while his hands get dirty (Sloterdijk 1992, 148–149). When we compare the cynical smile on the face of Tadić's bailiff and the identical expression on the face of Karadorđević's bureaucrat who oversees the looting of cattle from the peasants by gendarmes in Krsto Hegedušić's painting *Requisition* (1929), it is clear that the situation of the oppressed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the Republic of Croatia is more than similar. Hegedušić's ideas from the 1930s on the transfer of skills and knowledge that would enable semi-literate peasants from Podravina to use these tools to rise from poverty caused by Moloch of the Karadorđević dynasty were revolutionary in the world of art stretched between the extremes of academism, avant-garde, fascist, and socialist art. Today, they represent a kind of a manual for artists' work with vulnerable and marginalized groups, since they promote principles of participation, social awareness, and reciprocal transfer of knowledge.

Krsto Hegedušić began teaching the peasant painters Ivan Generalić in 1929 and Franjo Mraz in 1931. It is extremely important to understand the historical, economic and social context of the creation of the Zemlja Association, which forms the backbone of Hegedušić's experiment. The president of the Association, architect Drago Ibler formulated the 1929 manifesto of the Zemlja Association as follows:

One should live in the spirit of his age and create accordingly; Modern life is permeated with social ideas and the issues of the collective are paramount; The artist cannot

be unmoved by the aspirations of the new society and not be a part of the collective; Because art is the expression of the world in the making; Because art and life are one. (Ibler 1929, as cited in Prelog 2016).

Art historian Petar Prelog states that the manifesto and the programme of the Zemlja Association articulated a hitherto unknown idea in Croatian art: the one about the need to connect art and life, which implied joint action with firm ideological consent. This ideological agreement was based on the leftist ideas of the banned Communist Party in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and national consciousness articulated through the glorification of the peasantry as inaugurated by the Croatian Peasant Party (Prelog 2019, 15-17). Hegedušić's activities encompassed precisely these two political ideas.

We must emphasize that the constituent assembly of the Zemlja Association was held in February 1929, and in January of the same year, King Alexander introduced a dictatorship in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, that is, he dissolved the assembly, repealed the constitution and banned political parties. The Zemlja Association was banned by the Zagreb police on April 29, 1935, while in May of the same year the united opposition led by politician Vladko Maček went to the polls together, which meant a kind of return of parliamentary democracy to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (after the 1931 Octroic constitution and the assassination of King Alexander Karađorđević in 1934). The political repression in Karađorđević Kingdom of Yugoslavia resulted in social inequality, impoverishment of villages, and pauperization of workers in newly created sectors of the growing industries. Historian Suzana Leček shows that the economic crisis in the Kingdom since 1930 has further aggravated the already poor economic and social situation in the Croatian countryside. The fall in the prices of peasant products caused a fall in purchasing power, and thus the drying up of additional income and the accumulation of debt. The state reacted to the non-payment of taxes by force, namely by enforcement, taking from the peasants what was necessary for their survival, such as grain and cattle (Leček 2019, 110–111). The painting of Krsto Hegedušić *Requisition* very accurately depicts all the injustice and political repression that the Podravina peasants went through. Having in mind such a situation in the Croatian countryside, it is more than understandable that Krsto Hegedušić, by teaching painters from Hlebine, wanted to pass on the painting skills to the talented young men from Podravina as a survival tool. The exchange of skills and ideas was twofold: Hegedušić provided Generalić and Mraz with new competencies and new working ability, while they gave visible and measurable legitimacy to the social experiment and the science of artists by their participation in the third exhibition of the Zemlja Association in 1931.

Art historian Svjetlana Sumpor states that Hegedušić's style from the Zemlja Association period was formed under the influence of George Grosz, Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Brueghel. He was also inspired by ex-voto paintings on glass. He focused on the expression of artistically uneducated people and the effort to be understandable and acceptable to the workers and peasants with whom he conducted "experiments" and lessons. In his work with Generalić and Mraz, Hegedušić influenced their artwork by promoting an expression that he found close and understandable to them (Sumpor 2019, 55).

The Hlebine School, and then the phenomenon called Yugoslav naïve art, which Krsto Hegedušić created through the Zemlja Association and by teaching the peasant painters Ivan Generalić and Franjo Mraz, went a long way to where it is today. It started so that art (painting technique) became a tool which Hlebine painters implemented to end their economic problems; then it represented class (peasant) substitution for socialist realism in the early days of Socialist Yugoslavia; finally, the phase of highly commercial art productions in the golden age of the 1970s and 1980s was followed by an almost complete disappearance in the last decade. The village of Hlebine, which at the beginning of Hegedušić's experiment looked like the roughest transformation of Brueghel's villages, at one point became a factory of idyllic memories of Arcadia in which artworks were produced by all family members (organized in workshops) and then traded by world gallerists and agents, to finally return to its beginnings, to the misty Podravina plain.

Teaching Naïve Art to Students

When Maja Flajsig and Josip Zanki first came to Hlebine, the village looked like a mixture of fake agritourism, a nook in Podravina, and a reflection of the former School. The starting point of the project *Art in the Community: Redefining Heritage of the Association of Artists 'Zemlja'* was the current experience of the Hlebine School and the competencies that its representatives had that can be useful for members of the academic community, both for students of the Academy of Fine Arts and for students of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences. The aim of the project was to re-examine one of the most important points in Croatian art history, and that is the heritage related to the Zemlja Association and Krsto Hegedušić in the contemporary context. Hegedušić's heritage was observed precisely through his social doctrine, which taught the peasants the art of painting in order to generate new forces for the emancipation of the Croatian countryside and social change based on a fairer distribution of goods. It is the artist's activist ideas and the format of mentoring, especially through the Master Workshop led by Hegedušić at the Academy of Fine Arts

in Zagreb, that can be continued within the new circumstances in which a contemporary artist operates today (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 6). The project leaders were also aware that heritage of Hlebine School survives today because of the tireless projects of the curator of the Gallery of Naïve Art Helena Kušenić, such as the projects *HINT* and *KUL Hlebine*.

The project leaders Maja Flajsig and Josip Zanki also started from the idea that the acquisition of new skills and knowledge is crucial for artistic creation in the post-industrial era. Terry Eagleton states, based on examples of Bosnia and Belfast, that culture is not simply what we input in a cassette player; it is also what we kill for. As this author concludes, culture is not only what we live with, it is also largely what we live for. Affection, fellowship, memory, kinship, place, community, emotional fulfillment, intellectual pleasure, a sense of ultimate meaning are closer to most of us than a human rights charter or trade treaty, so it needs to be placed in a concrete political context to alleviate these needs by more abstract and generous connections (Eagleton 2002, 156). What culture loses on sublimity, it gains on applicability; in such circumstances (in a good and bad sense) nothing can be more false than the accusation that culture – including art production – is elegantly distant from everyday life (Eagleton 2002, 51).

The applicability of culture was more than visible in the first field part of the project, which took place in Hlebine in February 2020. Knowledge and skills were exchanged by naïve artists from Hlebine and Koprivnica: Zvonko Sigetić, Dražen Tetec, and Ivan Andrašić, then students of the Academy of Fine Arts: Klara Burić, Jelena Bogdanić and Dorian Pacak, under the mentorship of Sebastijan Dračić, and students of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology: Lea Biličić, Josip Čekolj and Damjan Roce, under the mentorship of Nevena Škrbić Alempijević. Divided in three teams, they created joint (participatory) artworks that used the Hlebine School heritage as a source of inspiration. The course of the project was thus marked by the reciprocal exchange of knowledge and experiences, but also by the creation of micro-communities that functioned according to the principles of mutual solidarity (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 7–8). The students of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology were not reduced to observers and collectors of ethnographic material but participated in the creative process in all its elements from taking photographs, touring locations, to helping to create an artwork. The students of Visual Arts have adopted different strategies and educational methods through this work; new painting technique (oil on glass), ethnographic approach in artistic research, intercultural intertwining of folk (naïve) and contemporary art, and awareness of working with economically deprived and marginalized social groups in order to sensitize the ideas of social justice.

During the second fieldwork, which took place at Stap and Paklenica National Park on the southern Velebit, the project sought to bring to life the utopian vision of the Hlebine School of Brueghel's earthly paradise, which naïve painting still seeks in memory of the idyllic Podravina village from the early 20th century. The project leaders decided to embody the Arcadia of Hlebine in the untouched idyllic landscape of Velebit. They chose southern Velebit as their polygon because it is completely isolated from traffic and the landscape is primordial in all its elements (forests, water, rocks, glades, sinkholes and valleys).

In that way, the *Art in the Community: Redefining Heritage of the Association of Artists 'Zemlja'* project connected two key elements of Hegedušić's activist heritage. The first is the teaching of peasants-artists of Podravina the art of painting as a method of social transformation. The second is the idea of a utopian vision of an earthly paradise recognizable and lived in a local landscape, not treated as an escape, but as a departure into the space of freedom beyond political narratives that can stimulate new impulses for social justice.

Creating a community

Upon entering into our research field, students of the University of Zagreb had only some basic insight into Croatian naïve art and its current state. As contemporary art historical narratives address this segment of Croatian art history as almost a footnote, a curiosity of its time embedded in the socialist spirit of the regime, students were not able to access knowledge and comprehension of it through their academic education and its resources. Furthermore, the institution intended to provide such contents, the Croatian Museum of Naïve art in Zagreb that was founded in 1952, closed its doors to public on 31st of December 2019. The heritage of Association of Artists Zemlja was recently presented in the exhibition of retrospective character *Art and Life are One: Association of Artists Zemlja 1929 – 1935* in 2019, as it marked the 90th anniversary of the Association's foundation. It should be mentioned that the last exhibition of this scale, *Critical Retrospective of Association of Artists Zemlja*, was held in 1971, in the former Yugoslavia (Prelog 2016, 38). As this specific phenomenon sparks interest of cultural institutions centralized in the capital of Croatia only sporadically, access to the legacy of Krsto Hegedušić and heritage of Croatian naïve art within the Academia and in general public is rather limited.

Even though fieldwork in Hlebine offered students an opportunity to learn some historical facts, the context of the phenomena, and the technical skill of oil painting on glass, it was the methodology of research that implied values and notions of the Association of Artists Zemlja and the Hlebine school. It potentiated mutual transfer of knowledge, skills, and experiences among

students of the Academy of Fine Arts and students of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, naïve artists, and local community. As all knowledge is interdisciplinary and disciplines continuously define and redefine themselves interactively (Clifford 1997, 191), the body of knowledge among participants became intertwined and offered new perspectives and some new forms of interpretation. Participants integrated their usual artistic preoccupations and interests and developed participatory works of art of experimental techniques and expressions, as well as accompanying ethnographic studies.

Fieldwork is earthbound, as James Clifford points out. It is intimately involved in the natural and social landscape (Clifford 1997, 185). Walking through the landscape of the village of Hlebine and the nearby town of Koprivnica was essential for the research team, micro-community of naïve artist Zvonko Sigetić, student of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology Josip Čekolj, and student of Visual Arts Dorian Pacak. The basis of their collaboration was transmission of generational knowledge, as Sigetić is an artist born in 1956. Process of their work was developing during long walks, when Sigetić talked about the past life of communities of Hlebine and Koprivnica, about his own childhood. In his usual artistic practice, Sigetić draws motifs from his own repository of memories, when village was not yet urbanized and when dwellers of this area worked together in synergy with each other, in synergy with their natural surroundings. Pacak and Čekolj, both coming from places of agrarian past, witnessed only some transformations of those places, of rapid urbanization from their own perspective, which allowed them to develop a sensitive connection toward Sigetić's stories and his construction of community identification (Čekolj 2020). As Čekolj writes, Sigetić's idealized portraiture of the past included a negative vision of the future that urbanization of the village brings. Sharing memories of his past functioned as a pledge for future generations, as he strongly emphasized the need for a return to coexistence with nature and social relations based upon solidarity and mutual exchange which also fulfilled the basic need for leisure (Čekolj 2020, 40). The artistic collaboration resulted in several works of art that both artists created in their own medium. Pacak drew with felt-tip pen on paper, whereas Sigetić painted with oil on glass. These compositions were inspired by characteristic scenes of everyday life (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 8), of their long walks though the scenery which stimulated Sigetić to paint contemporary landscape and encouraged Pacak to draw himself as a part of this landscape, as a part of the community.

Naïve artist Dražen Tetec, a student of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology Lea Biličić, and a student of Visual Arts Klara Burić also found their inspiration in the landscape. Even more, both Tetec and Burić found that Drava river marked their childhood memories. Although their memories are very



Picture 1. Collaboration of Klara Burić and Dražen Tetec, photography by Lea Biličić, 2020.

distinctive, since Burić comes from Slavonija, the east of Croatia, and is 25 years younger than Tetec, they both came to the same conclusions regarding the wellbeing of proximity to river that is brought upon people. Not only in the sense of survival, but also in the sense of spiritual calmness (Biličić 2020). In her usual artistic practice, Burić emphasizes a sense of belonging to nature and is eager to point out the possibility of a collective return to communion with nature. Tetec shares this set of values in his own artistic practice, but also gives a critique of contemporary moment. He criticizes society and its problems in the tradition of socially engaged art of Krsto Hegedušić (Biličić 2020, 24) and uses his art as an actor of social change.

In their artistic collaboration, Burić and Tetec in cooperation with Biličić developed an exchange of transgenerational knowledge which involved a traditional oil painting on glass as well as a contemporary site-specific concept. They produced a conceptual work, an installation on the bank of Drava river. The seemingly unfinished oil painting on window glass was placed in relation to the landscape, and was completed by setting our gaze upon it (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 8). It problematizes the imagining of landscape, the human relation to it, as well as our influence on it. In that way, it echoes definitions proposed by Eric Hirsch, about landscape as a cultural process that is a con-



Picture 2. View of Drava by Klara Burić and Dražen Tetec, photography by Lea Biličić, 2020.

stantly changing and redefining category. It is a cultural idea in the context of everyday life (Hirsch 2003, 1-22), a way of understanding our own relation to the nature.

During the processes of urbanization of the village of Hlebine, relation towards nature started to change, as economy previously based on agriculture started to develop in different directions. This was also due to the increasing interest of the dwellers of Hlebine towards naïve art after the great success of some local artist. After World War II, almost every family in Hlebine had at least one naïve artist. Naïve art was internationally recognized as various representatives exhibited in São Paulo (1955), Bruxelles (1958), Knokke-le-Zoute, Basel, Baden-Baden, and across Yugoslavia (Maleković 2008, 68), which formed a stable market for naïve art. Effectively, it produced an economical surplus that allowed dwellers of Hlebine an independence from agriculture as only and primary resource. Bojan Mrđenović, a Croatian artist of younger generation, was invited to the project to record a documentary video and to conduct research about specific economics of naïve art in Hlebine and their repercussions in contemporary moment. By conducting fieldwork and collecting data from villagers, Mrđenović became an ethnographer, deciphering personal stories of people who were not artists, but their relatives; sisters, sons,



Picture 3. Bara Mustafa, photography by Bojan Mrdenović, 2020.

and wives. As Hal Foster writes in his seminal work *Artist as Ethnographer?*, this was an opportunity for Mrdenović “(...) to collaborate with communities innovatively; for instance, to recover suppressed histories that are sited in particular ways, that are accessed by some more effectively than others” (Foster 1996, 197). He also conducted an interview with sculptor Bara Mustafa, one of the rare female naïve artists, whose artistic occupations started in 1969. (Škunca 1985). In the short documentary Mrdenović made, Bara Mustafa retells her own experience, which implies her uprising as a woman artist in the context of patriarchal society. Furthermore, Mustafa shares her memories of Krsto Hegedušić and his visits to village of Hlebine where he taught and advised naïve artists.

In the manner of these Hegedušić’s visits to Hlebine, two artists of younger generation, Luka Hrgović and Duje Medić, also arrived to Hlebine. As *Art in the Community: Redefining Heritage of the Association of Artist ‘Zemlja’* project was aimed towards collaboration and working with local community, Hrgović and Medić organized workshops in Hlebine and Koprivnica for children of local elementary and high schools. Aspiring to teach them about contemporary art, they presented their artistic practices and designed workshops in accordance to them. While Hrgović presented his science fiction film *Slice of Life* and created models of dystopian cities he used for his film, Medić, working in a more traditional manner of drawing on paper, created a workshop of *horror vacui* drawing. Furthermore, Hrgović and Medić filmed a video, an announcement for the project in their corresponding humorous artistic expression in

which they combined elements of traditional culture into the contemporary context of the project (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 8).

In the pursuit of reciprocal exchange of knowledge and building of a community, naïve art came to Zagreb, specifically to the Academy of Fine Arts. Zlatko Kolarek, president of the Association of Naïve Painters and Sculptors of Hlebine, held a workshop for a broader group of students of the Academy of Fine Arts. Students were thus given an opportunity to learn the technique of oil painting on glass as well as to meet a representative of contemporary naïve art who advised them and challenged their academic ways of thinking.

The Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb was also a locality where naïve artist Ivan Andrašić, student of Visual Arts Jelena Bogdanić, and student of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology Damjan Roce conducted their research. After their initial visit to the village of Hlebine and the town of Koprivnica, where they visited Andrašić's atelier, this team decided to place their research base in Bogdanić's atelier at the Academy of Fine Arts. Similar to the other cases, artists worked in synergy, according to their usual artistic interests and pre-occupation. As well as previously mentioned micro communities, they identified certain common points in their biographies and continued to work upon them (Škrbić Alempijević 2020, 17). Andrašić, Bogdanić and Roce diagnosed the current state of cultural life on local and global levels considering the spirit of time, the neoliberal capitalism that dictates hyperproduction of poor quality (Roce 2020). Andrašić's work is very traditional, and his landscapes are created meticulously and slowly as an opposition to rapid commercialization of art and "fast food culture" (Roce 2020, 41). Bogdanić's artistic practice is placed on the same spectre, but in a different expression. She is mostly concerned with overuse of single-use plastic and global pollution of natural resources. Bogdanić uses art as a means of raising awareness of these ecological problems, as she creates art out of recycled plastic materials (Roce 2020). Thus, Bogdanić and Andrašić decided to place traditional motifs of naïve art (such as landscapes and flowers) on pressed plastic bags, plexiglass, and other recycled materials as a contemporary counterpoint to traditionally used glass (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 8).

In Search of Arcadia

Pointing out ecological problems, returning to coexistence with nature and stating solidarity that grows from these ways of understanding seem very symptomatic in the context of this research. Longing for natural surroundings that do not exist anymore (or are in a great danger), that is embedded in these approaches, functioned also as an incentive for the second part of the fieldwork, the one positioned on the peaks of the mountain Velebit.



Picture 4. Collaboration of Ivan Andrašić and Jelena Bogdanić, photography by Damjan Roce, 2020.

As Gupta and Ferguson propose, “Going to the ‘field’ suggests a trip to a place that is agrarian, pastoral, or maybe even ‘wild’; it implies a place that is perhaps cultivated (a site of culture), but that certainly does not stray too far from nature.” (Gupta and Ferguson 1997, 7). Placing the fieldwork at the locations in the “wild” area of Stap and Paklenica National Park on the Velebit



Picture 5. Maja Rožman, Dorian Pacak and Luka Tomić during the workshop, photography by Maja Flajsig, 2020.

mountain was motivated by the slowly vanishing memory of earthly paradise, Arcadia set in Hlebine before processes of urbanization emerged, which inspired first generations of naïve artists (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 8).

Professor at the Academy of Fine Arts Maja Rožman led a woodcarving workshop alongside Professor and co-author of the project Josip Zanki at the flat karst valley of Stap with students of the Academy of Fine Arts Dorian Pacak and Luka Tomić³. At the location of Stap, they reinterpreted the manifesto of Association of Artists Zemlja and used it as a starting point of their artistic research.

Each of the authors created their works according to his or her own poetics and symbolic understanding of motifs from nature. As well as previously described works of art, this individual, yet collective *modus operandi* follows the thesis about Association of Artists Zemlja as an exceptionally heterogenic formation with no stylistic unity, but of an emphasized programmatic self-determination (Vuković 2019, 13). Professor Josip Zanki interpreted his long-term deep acquaintance with Velebit mountain and the observation of its rocky heights by stylizing characteristic stone structures. Student Jelena Bogdanić

3 As students Klara Burić and Jelena Bogdanić could not join the workshop on Velebit, they created their works according to their previous experience of the Velebit landscape.



Picture 6. Woodcut printing, photography by Maja Flajsig, 2020.

noticed the constant change in the kaleidoscope of stone, water and plants that takes place in Velebit landscape as she tried to translate her impression of abstract beauty in her artwork. On the other hand, student Dorian Pacak dedicated his work to Slavko Tomerlin Tatek. During his life on the mountain, Tatek built a shelter and traced paths. He contributed to the community in many other ways, such as on a spiritual level, carving artworks into cliffs and discovering art where we would not notice it at first glance. Student Luka Tomić looked back at current trends in contemporary art with which he does not identify, emphasizing the idea from the manifesto that says that art should be created in the spirit of its time. Thus, Tomić observes cliffs and stones in Velebit through a sexualized narrative, noticing phallic and vulvoid forms.

Student Klara Burić also creates in the spirit of the times, and again, accordingly to her previously mentioned artistic preoccupations. She is concerned with excessive deforestation, which has numerous repercussions on the entire ecosystems. In this sense, the artist realizes that the community of people and nature is deeply disturbed and the understanding of the interconnectedness is absent like trees in whose places now only stumps are found. Professor Maja Rožman also dealt with the notions of absence and presence, drawing the line of the Velebit horizon that separates heaven and earth, reality and the supernatural, apathy and revolution (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 8-9).



Picture 7. Performance by Luka Tomić, photography by Maja Flajsig, 2020.

Irish artist Mark Cullen⁴ created a land art workshop alongside Josip Zanki and Maja Flajsig in Paklenica National Park with students of the Academy of Fine Arts Marta Dijak, Ante Dujmović and Luka Tomić. During their stays in the hidden corners of untouched nature, the participants of the workshop created works of art through a meditative approach and guided by the idea of the all-pervading forces of nature flowing through their bodies and the surrounding environment. Very subtle works of art that can be noticed only by careful observation have thus found their place within the harmony of the Velebit mountain. Ephemeral works of art have shown complete immersion in nature, but again a fidelity to their own poetics of different sensibilities.

Starting from the elements of nature, the participants reacted to the context of the space and accordingly created works from materials found *in situ*. Minimalist works were thus created along the course of the stream, following the bending of dry branches and observing the leaves falling into the stream face down. Following the rhythm and harmony of the natural environment, small beaches, rows of bridges, and stone benches were formed. The final work created within this project ends it in a very symbolic way. Participatory work

4 Due to the coronavirus pandemic, the artist could not be present physically, so he advised the team online.

of all authors was themed by the equinox⁵, a period of the last harvest of the year, a period extremely important for farmers, as well as for naïve artists (Flajsig and Zanki 2020, 9).

Conclusion

The ethnographic dimension provided the *Art in the Community* project with a deeper understanding of *who* makes the community, in which the ways local inhabitants form their relationships towards naïve art, how they implement them in their everyday lives, and what networks should be triggered to turn artistic practice into the community's resource.

The postmodernist critique has often pointed out the limits of participatory approaches in cases when a community is targeted as a whole (cf. Nielsen and Jørgensen 2018). Still, the ethnographic material from Hlebine has shown that it is justifiable to address "community" as a subject in this research, rather than a set of gifted and outstanding individuals. The community is a niche in which the collective memory of all the stages of naïve art lives and is perpetuated by cultural policies. It is the interpretation of this component of artistic practice ethnologists and cultural anthropologists can make the greatest contribution to.

The methodology of the project was based on full collaboration of all stakeholders (naïve painters, future "educated" artists, future ethnologists, and cultural anthropologists, representatives of professional associations, cultural and educational institutions, etc.). Such a participative approach shifted standard views of art defined by the dogmas of individualism and authorship, while at the same time it made the dividing line between the researchers and the researched rather blurry. It has also approached educational process carried out in the academic environment from another angle, from its margins. The project has turned those who are often looked down upon and marginalized in the artistic world due to the lack of formal education into teachers, tutors, and collaborators in the artistic process. It has also shed a different light on knowledge production and challenged all the participants to abolish the elitization of artistic activity. In that way, it echoed and revived the postulates of Hegedušić's programme, and called for socially engaged and emancipatory art as a striving for a more just society.

But what does the project give back to the local community in a practical sense, in terms of certain mechanisms and tools for making a change? The participative ethnographic and artistic work did not function only as a means that made the voice of local inhabitants heard. It provided them with additional modes of agency, by opening up some new networks and promotional

5 It occurred on the date of equinox, September 22nd, 2020.

channels and confirming the status of their artwork as social capital. By reciprocally sharing knowledge of ways to create art rather than proscribing what is aesthetically appropriate from the academic point of view, the art making has been turned into an inclusive and empowering process. The artistic competencies, just like in Hegedušić's activities in the 1930s, have been defined as tools to help the community address the social challenges they face. Set in a concrete political and economic context and within a web of cultural institutions ready to support such an approach, those skills and collaborative strategies can contribute to sustainability of rural communities. In the process of redefining their position on the mental maps of vibrant artistic places, the community becomes less marginalized and more resilient to various types of crises.

Viewed through that prism, understanding the heritage related to the Association of Artists Zemlja, Hegedušić and Croatian naïve art from the contemporary perspective can provide a certain toolbox for future generations that live in neoliberal capitalism. The notions of the collective and its solidarity expressed by the Association of Artists Zemlja (Vuković 2019, 14) stand out as what is known as *really useful knowledge*. This term was coined in the 1820s and the 1830s, when workers' organizations in the United Kingdom started to raise awareness of the need for self-education. The expression *really useful knowledge* encompassed various "unpractical" disciplines as an opposition to the "useful knowledge" as defined by business owners. The knowledge of politics, philosophy and economy unveils the causes of exploitation and traces its origins within the ruling ideology alongside its collective emancipatory potential (*What, How & for Whom* 2014, 19). In that sense, the meaning of applicability has also changed. It calls for moving away from the perception of applied sciences through their measurable and profit-based impact on the labour market, towards their potential to address social issues and inequalities, as well as to make a change. The participative approaches that connect ethnography, art, and community work indeed functioned as *really useful knowledge* produced and applied in the village of Hlebine.

Acknowledgements

This article was made possible thanks to partnership, cooperation and coordination with Croatian Association of Artists, CreArt: Network of Cities for Artistic Creation, Koprivnica City Museum, Gallery of Naïve Art in Hlebine, Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, Archive of Academy of Fine Arts, Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies in Zagreb, National Park Paklenica, Pallas Projects and Studios in Dublin.

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