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Heritage of Liminality: Remnants of the Military in the Istrian City of Pula in the Aftermath of Yugoslav Socialism

Abstract

This article is devoted to the meanings of the liminality that shaped the (self-) perception of the Croatian city of Pula and came as a result of the long-term presence of the military (and heavy industry) in the city. The study discusses the modalities of cohabitation of the Yugoslav People's Army and the citizens of Pula, who lived together, interacted, and shaped each other during the period of Yugoslav socialism, and highlights the consequences of this mutual shaping in the aftermath of the Yugoslav socialist project. In the ongoing process of Pula's contentious urban transformation, in which several military and industrial facilities, complexes, and areas still wait for their new functions and new owners, the city's military nature and liminality have been identified as a problem by authorities and policy makers: they see the material and immaterial traces of the presence of the military in the city as an "unwanted heritage". In opposition to the view that Pula's military (and industrial) heritage is a problem to be overcome/eliminated, the article argues for a more inclusive approach that would acknowledge the fact that this heritage is

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perceived by citizens as closely related to their city's multicultural and working-class tradition, and that would recognize its potential to produce meanings, values, histories, and memories.

Keywords: Pula, military, liminality, heritage, socialism.

Introduction

Situated strategically at the peak of triangle-shaped peninsula of Istria in Croatia, the coastal city of Pula “was created primarily around the navy, then the civil port, and the industry” (Falski, 2019, p. 137).¹ The city's recent history, demographic structure, materiality, but also “urban spirit” were strongly marked by the presence of two important collective activities: the military and the shipbuilding industry. Although both of them were older than Yugoslav socialism, they witnessed unprecedented development and importance in the period of the socialist Yugoslavia (1945–1991). Both became marginalized, exhausted and eventually abandoned in the post-socialist Croatia, leaving behind vast empty areas in the urban fabric of Pula, the largest city on the Istrian peninsula and the eighth largest in Croatia.

Pula was one of the most recognizable “military cities” during Yugoslav socialism. There was a large number of soldiers and officers, as many as 143 military facilities, including fifteen large barracks, and all three kinds of military were represented – navy, infantry and aviation (“Tvornice radnicima, kasarne građanima”, 2009). The number of soldiers serving in Pula was enormous – as a former Yugoslav soldier wrote on a Facebook page, “in all Yugoslavia, JNA [Yugoslav People's Army – *Jugoslovenska narodna armija*] soldiers were exempt from paying for public transport, but not in Pula, because there were almost more soldiers than civilians in this city.” Officers and their families lived in 2,200 “military apartments” (“Tvornice radnicima, kasarne građanima”, 2009). Some of the numerous barracks in Pula were centrally located, surrounded by apartment blocks and busy streets. The Karlo Rojc barracks, for example, occupied the largest building in the city in the period from 1976 to 1991. Built in 1870, it used to be the Navy school during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and

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a secondary technical school with a dormitory for 2,500 students in 1947–1953. The Vladimir Gortan and Vladimir Širola barracks were also located in the city. Large military areas of Katarina and the Muzil peninsula were centrally located and occupied one-fifth of the city's area (Falski, 2019, p. 143; Hodges, 2019; Kardov, 2014, p. 134). The fence surrounding these barracks and military bases within the city made the space they occupied simultaneously part of the city space and a realm outside the logic of urban life. The most important mode of such presence of the army in the city is a *domain*, a territory physically secluded from the rest of the city, to which access is restricted. On cadastral maps, the presence of the military is designated by blank, empty areas, outside reach and control of the public and civilian society (Stilinović et al., 2014). Citizens of Pula could not ignore these large areas and buildings in the middle of their urban space, but they were at the same time outside of their reach. The extensive size and number of barracks in Pula and the overwhelming presence of soldiers and uniformed people in the city resulted in a sense of liminality – the citizens did not perceive their city as entirely belonging to them: it simultaneously was and was not their city.

The extensive presence of the Yugoslav military was not the only reason that made Pula an ambiguous and liminal place, a city that simultaneously belonged and did not belong to its inhabitants. It was also the industrial infrastructure. The Uljanik shipyard, established in the bay of Pula in 1856 to cater the needs of the Austro-Hungarian navy, still defines city landscape with its mighty cranes. These metal giants are a reminder of the most important Pula's industry, which, together with the military, shaped the city in the second half of the twentieth century. The shipyard occupies a large part of Pula stretching along the coastline. Just like the barracks, these large industrial facilities are “hidden from the eyes of the public, tourists [...], and even Pula's citizens. Behind the shipyard wall that divides one Pula from the other Pula, there is an invisible life, accessible to ordinary citizens who are not Uljanik's workers only through auditory images” (Korovljev, 2000, as cited in Matošević, 2018, p. 197).

The presence of the military and the industry during socialism and their absence in its aftermath – coupled with Pula's inability “to develop organically” (Hodges, 2019) and its status of a historically marginalized city, away from the main roads and of little interest to visitors² – resulted in

² Although it became a major military port in the mid-nineteenth century, the perception of Pula as a boring city with no life and a place away from important routes proved to be very persistent. The Slovenian writer Ivan Cankar spent some time there in 1898 and wrote of it as “a boring place”; he complained that he had to “live in solitude in that abandoned Pula, forgotten by God and people” and swore that “he would never come back again” (Arambašin Slišković,

specific forms of liminality and ambiguity experienced by local residents: large areas of the city, although quite central, were out of reach, fenced and with restricted access, but still vital for the city's life, for its everyday existence and its multicultural urban culture.³

In this article, I ask about the meanings of these collective states of ambiguity and liminality and the meanings which they produce. Although I touch upon the meanings of industry and deindustrialization for the relationship between the urban space of Pula and its inhabitants, I am primarily concerned with how the Yugoslav People's Army and the city of Pula lived together, interacted, and shaped each other during the period of Yugoslav socialism, as well as with the consequences of this mutual shaping for Pula's (self-)perception in the aftermath of the Yugoslav socialist project. I trace the manifestations of the ambiguity resulting from the military presence in Pula, contextualize it historically, and follow the ways it is renegotiated once Pula became a post-military city. The discussion that follows is methodologically based on a combination of discourse analysis of various media texts on Pula and its urban transformation as well as of policy documents trying to direct this transformation, with an ethnographic material obtained through interviews with the inhabitants of Pula, and digital ethnography, which I used to discern views and memories of the former Yugoslav Army soldiers who used to serve in this city in the 1970s and the 1980s.

In the next section, I contextualize the case of Pula in the broader context of the relationship between militarism and urbanism and provide a historical overview of how military presence shaped the urban life of Pula and the perception of the city by its residents. I then explore the coexistence of the city and the army in the second half of the twentieth century. Rather than focusing only on the very presence of the army in the city of Pula during socialism, on dividing lines and separate worlds, I am more interested in the ways in which the city was shared, experienced and perceived by both

1996, p. 400, as cited in Matošević, 2021, p. 41). James Joyce worked for Berlitz English language school in Pula in 1904, teaching Austro-Hungarian navy officers. His impression of Pula was similar: in his letters home, he described the city as "a back-of-God-speed place – a naval Siberia with 37 men o'war in the harbour." He described Istria as "a long boring place wedged into the Adriatic, peopled by ignorant Slavs who wear little red caps and colossal breeches" (Matošević, 2021, p. 7; Pula+2020, 2016, p. 97). Despite a good salary, Joyce did not miss the first chance to escape this boredom and moved with his partner to Trieste already in 1905.

³ In the period of Socialist Yugoslavia, these perceptions of liminality and ambiguity, which Pula's citizens associate with their city's urban space, coexisted with a rather central place the city had in Yugoslavia's symbolic geography: President Tito's residence was nearby, on the Brioni islands, Pula hosted the major Yugoslav film festival from 1954, and in the 1970s the Uljanik shipyard produced mammoth ships for the global market using cutting-edge technology.

sides – its citizens and the soldiers who served in Pula. I argue that, rather than creating two separate worlds with rarely permeable boundaries, the presence of JNA in Pula made the urban space liminal and its perception ambiguous for both groups, which is perceived, described and narrated in the categories of *neither-nor*, fluidity, intertwinement and mixture.

In the last section, I explore material traces of the decades-long presence of the Yugoslav army in the city and the ways in which space once occupied by the JNA is transformed and appropriated in the present. I also discuss how Pula's citizens and authorities engage with the lingering liminality of their city caused by long-term presence of the military. That presence had an important role in the collective perception of Pula by its citizens as a low-profile city, away from main roads and important events, suffering from the "appendix syndrome" ("sindrom slijepog crijeva"; Kalčić, 2012, p. 73). This (self-)perception imbued with ambiguity, I argue, is not necessarily hindering, frustrating, and disempowering. It can also be a source of affective attachment, and it can result in practices of resistance, social critique, mobilization, and engagement.

The City and the Military: An Uneasy Coexistence

Cohabitation of the military and the city is neither a recent phenomenon nor is it limited to the part of the world that experienced socialism. Cities and military forces have been living together, or next to each other, for centuries. In many places the military played an important role in the organization of urban and demographic structures, everyday life, industry, etc. (Hawkins, 2001; MacLeish, 2013). The military heavily affects "the materialities and visceralities of everyday urban life" (Catterall, 2009, p. 380; Graham, 2009, p. 399) also in present-day cities, albeit more in terms of high technology than physical presence.

What makes it interesting to look at the ways the JNA shaped Yugoslav cities during socialism is an elaborate military infrastructure that reorganized urban space in many of them in order to serve the needs of the massive military based on conscription. The network of barracks, garrisons, military bases, training grounds, border posts, and army cultural centers (*domovi vojske*) covered the whole territory of the former Yugoslavia. The army employed a large number of people who serviced it and provided support. Many industries provided the army with food, clothes, and other supplies. The JNA had officer training schools, hospitals, apartment blocks for officers and their families as well as resorts where they could spend their holidays (Hadžić, 2001, p. 321, n. 40; Petrović, 2010). This infrastructure

was particularly dense in some of the Yugoslav cities – those which, due to their location, had already played an important military role in times prior to the socialist era. For most of them, the period of Yugoslav socialism was characterized by the large-scale presence of the military in the urban space, which is also apparent on city maps.⁴

Following the global trend of demilitarization and limiting military infrastructure, in all these “military cities” the post-socialist period is characterized by a radical reduction of the city space occupied by the military: the barracks have been abandoned, taken over by alternative culture, or repurposed and redesigned to fit the needs of new institutions (Falski, 2019; Hodges, 2019; Kardov et al., 2014; Mitrović, 2016). The case of Pula as a model Yugoslav “military city” offers an insight into processes of militarization of urban space in the second half of the twentieth century that has not been intrinsically connected to the ideas of killing, war and violence, and is thus complementary to a large body of research discussing (de)militarization in relation to violence and its lingering aftereffects (Bickford, 2013; Lutz, 2002; MacLeish, 2013).

Pula’s identity as a military city goes back much further than the period of socialist Yugoslavia. According to Darko Dukovski, the author of an extensive history of Pula, there was a military fortress where the city is today as early as in the Roman times (Dukovski, 2011, p. 29). In the middle of the nineteenth century Pula became the main military harbor of the Habsburg empire. This period – when also the Arsenal was built, which caused massive migration to the city and gave employment to many locals – was considered “the golden age” of Pula. The construction of the barracks began in 1851, followed by the military hospital, the Admiralty building, and the railway that connected the city with Trieste. This is when Pula’s distinctively military character was shaped. Moreover, it was then that a narrative developed of close connection with the army as a historical destiny of Pula (Dukovski, 2011, pp. 112–114).

In socialist Yugoslavia, the extensive presence of the military in the city was seen as a continuation and confirmation of this destiny. Matej Križman writes about this as follows:

Pula je bila poseban slučaj. Zbog svog geopolitičkog položaja, klimatskih i uvjeta prehrane - Pula je još od doba Austro-Ugarske Monarhije bila snažna vojna baza. Grad je naprosto bio načičkan vojnim objektima, zagušen mnoštvom vojnih lica i njihovih obitelji. Simbolički, stanovništvo Pule bilo je podijeljeno u trećine. Trećina ljudi radila je u industriji, trećina u turizmu, trećina je bila u vojsci ili je s vojskom bila povezana.⁵

⁴ For Bitola and Skopje, see Stilinović et al., 2014.

⁵ “Pula was a special case. Owing to its geopolitical position, climate, and production of food

The relationship between the military and the city has never been an easy one: it has been perceived as a problem and a necessity at the same time, a driving force of the city's development on the one hand and its limiting factor on the other. The fact is, however, that it was the imperial military that made Pula "a European and cosmopolitan city" in the middle of the nineteenth century, and it was the Yugoslav People's Army that made it an important point on the map of socialist Yugoslavia. As Joshua Kalčić writes, "Pula's historical multiethnic and multicultural melting pot has been seasoned with historical reflections of the military harbor and military mentality present for centuries" (Kalčić, 2012, p. 72). The city is characterized by its geographical location away from main roads, and by specific, actually cosmopolitan urbanity atypical for Istria, Croatia and Yugoslavia, and for cities of small size in general (Kalčić, 2012, p. 72). The presence of the military has always been seen as a source of the city's prosperity and simultaneously a hindrance of its development according to the needs of the residents. Considering this ambiguous attitude, Darko Dukovski observes:

U odnosu na ostale zemlje socijalističkoga političkog sustava, potkraj 60-ih i početkom 70-ih u bivšoj državi dostignuta je zavidna razina slobode. Pula tu slobodu nije mogla do kraja osjetiti jer se u njezin društveni i kulturni život stalno uplitala vojska. Kao i početkom [dvadesetog] stoljeća, tako je i tada Pula bila "puna", ali vojske. To je bila njezina povijesna sudbina. Nakon sjedinjenja, pretvorena je u veliku vojarnu i pomorsku bazu. Koliko je to bilo dobro u održavanju gradskoga, lokalnoga gospodarstva, uslužnih djelatnosti, infrastrukture, toliko je vojska smetala u urbanističkome smislu. Urbanistički su se planovi morali prilagoditi potrebama vojske, a ne građanstva, što bi bilo logičnije; vojni se objekti nisu mogli prenamijeniti ni onda kada su postali nepotrebni, a vojska se, vrlo često, nadalje ponašala kao čuvar pravovjernih ideologijskih obrazaca i dogmi. (Dukovski, 2011, pp. 259–261)⁶

Pula had been a strong military base since the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The city was simply saturated with military facilities, suffocating from the heavy presence of military personnel and their families. Symbolically, Pula's population was divided into three parts. One third worked in industry, the second third was in tourism, and the last third was in the military or was related to it in some way." (Križman, 2017, pp. 32–33)

⁶ "Compared with other socialist countries, in the former Yugoslavia a significant degree of freedom was reached in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Pula could not fully enjoy this freedom because the military kept intervening in the city's social and cultural life. Just like at the beginning of the [twentieth] century, Pula was "full," but this time it was full of the military. That was the city's historical destiny. After the [Yugoslav] unification, Pula was turned into a large military and navy base. That was good for the local economy, services, and infrastructure. At the same time, however, the military presence was bad in terms of urbanization. Urban planning had to be adjusted to the needs of the army, and not to those of the citizens, which would be more logical. Military facilities were not allocated for a different use, not even when they became obsolete and useless. The army frequently acted as a guardian of rigid ideological patterns and dogmas. (Dukovski, 2011, pp. 259–261; see also: Hodges, 2019)

A Liminal Urban Space

The excessive presence of the army in Pula often made “ordinary citizens” feel that the city is not always theirs and that it is theirs only to some extent. This feeling stemmed both from the fact that there were military zones in the city and from the sheer number of JNA soldiers in the streets, squares, and restaurants. The latter was particularly the case on Wednesdays and at weekends – when they could leave their bases and barracks. “When soldiers would go out, the citizens of Pula would slowly withdraw from public spaces,” wrote one of these former JNA soldiers on the Facebook group called “Pula iz vremena Jugoslavije” [Pula from the times of Yugoslavia].

On the other hand, thousands of young conscripts from all corners of Yugoslavia, most of whom had just graduated from high school, could feel lucky that they ended up in a nice city on the Adriatic coast of all places. The city where they served, however, was accessible to them only partially. “The city I never got to know” is how a former JNA soldier described Pula in a discussion on Facebook. The impossibility to access and experience the city stemmed not only from the fact that the soldiers’ movement in the urban space was restricted and that they were rarely allowed to cross the fences. Even when they were out of the bases, their pathways, destinations, and interactions with the city and its citizens were predefined by the very uniform they were wearing. JNA soldiers regularly went out of the barracks, usually in groups, for a drink at weekends, or when someone came to visit them – their parents, girlfriends, or friends. These outings, however, did not offer them an opportunity to leave the military world and go back to the ordinary one: they rather took the world of the military out of the barracks with them, as they were required to wear uniforms also outside barrack premises. Dressed in uniforms and thus sharply distinguished from “ordinary citizens,” they would stick together, walking around the town, having drinks in restaurants, or going to local cinema halls to kill time. In Pula, there were several places and spaces that only partially and ambiguously belonged to the urban fabric of the city as they were frequented by the soldiers of the Yugoslav army: restaurants, cafes, and cinemas that were considered “for soldiers” and were avoided by the locals. One of them was cafe Mate on the Promenade, owned by the legendary Yugoslav boxing champion Mate Parlov. Likewise, Dukovski writes that “the Istra cinema was a bit away from the city center, near the Arena [Roman amphitheater]. It belonged to Pula less than any other cinema in the city because it was mainly visited by soldiers, and its repertoire had been adjusted accordingly” (Dukovski, 2011, p. 249).

In the period of industrial decline, temporary contract workers of the Uljanik shipyard, who typically were not Pula residents, described the sense of liminality and estrangement in a way similar to the soldiers in JNA uniforms. In a documentary on Uljanik, one of the workers says:

Čudan je to osjećaj kada se izlazi iz Uljanika nakon obavljenoga dnevnog rada, izlazite i imate nekakav unutarnji osjećaj da vanjskom svijetu jednostavno smetate, djelujete poput turističke atrakcije u dugim hlačama i cipelama, ponekad zaželite da se ispod ceste napravi nekakva vrsta tunela da bi mogli proći do kuće – jer je očito da smo mi koji radimo ovdje iza ovoga zida, zapravo ovome društvu potrebni samo utoliko dok smo otraga i dok radimo, međutim vanjskom svijetu mi smo neprimjetljivi i sasvim kao takvi nepotrebni.⁷

This, however, never meant that the army (and the industry) and the city were two separate worlds. In Pula, they cohabitated in complex and fluid ways. There were rare possibilities for the soldiers to experience the “ordinary” city life or some chunks of it, and these moments are remembered and narrated as particularly important memories from the service in the army. Former JNA soldiers shared their memories on a Facebook page: “I served in the Katarina barracks in 1983 and 1984. It was on the coast, at the very entrance to the harbor. I went to the film festival in the Arena and watched the premiere screening of *Variola Vera*. I also sang in a mixed military-civilian choir and we performed all around Istria”; “I was twice at the film festival in the Pula Arena and as soccer aficionado I went to see games of the Istria football club. Swimming was forbidden, but I remember Verudela beach, I was there only once”; “Once the officers sent us to the Arena to arrange seats for the film festival. Ljubiša Samardžić [a famous Yugoslav actor] bought us beer then.”

Some of these “escapes to the ordinary” meant breaking the rules, while others were actually enabled by the military. Similarly, there were practices of mixing (such as a civilian-military choir, or soldiers’ regular visits to Pula’s schools) and places that belonged to the military but enabled interaction between civilians and soldiers – for example, the Army Cultural Center (*Dom vojske*), where cultural events were held and where the two worlds came together. Every Saturday, there were parties in the canteen of the Pula Arena textile factory, organized in cooperation with the JNA and its orchestra, and

⁷ “It’s a strange feeling to leave Uljanik after the shift – you go out and you have this sort of feeling that you’re bothering the outside world, looking like a tourist attraction in these long pants and shoes. Sometimes you wish that there was a tunnel built under the streets of Pula that could take you home, since it’s obvious that we who work behind this wall are necessary to society only as long as we remain behind and work. When we enter the outside world, we are unnoticeable and as such redundant.” (Korovljević, 2000, as cited in Matošević, 2018, p. 205, translation mine)

“at least a hundred Arena workers married local army officers” who came to the city from all over Yugoslavia (Bonfiglioli, 2021, p. 48).

Writing about the Palestinian city of Ramallah – “a city under siege, encamped and militarily surrounded” – Nasser Abourahme notices “a curious liminality” in which it exists: “tethered between indirect colonial occupation and the restless mobilization of local urbanity – neither directly occupied nor free, besieged but somehow vibrant” (Abourahme, 2009, p. 500). Although the military presence in Pula was of a very different nature, it contributed to a sense of liminality shared by its residents. Similarly to Ramallah, a sense of alienation caused by the presence of the military had always been complemented by a specific local urbanity and cultural production which was unusually intense for a rather small city. This cultural creativity was not necessarily in tension with the military or in opposition to it. The life of the military often overlapped with the city’s everyday rhythms,⁸ and intersected with its urban life in sometimes unexpected ways. For example, in 1980, Pula’s cult rock band, *Atomsko sklonište*, recorded their live album “*Atomska trilogija*” in the Army Cultural Center because they could achieve the best sound quality there.

The same was true also for the intertwining of the urban life of Pula and the industry – another major activity that made the urban space simultaneously belong and not belong to Pula’s inhabitants. Despite the fact that the Uljanik shipyard was “a city within the city” (Matošević, 2018, p. 197), the industry had not been perceived as something alien to Pula. On the contrary – it gave the city a distinctive working-class character and importantly shaped the infrastructure, the everyday urbanity, and popular culture. Branko Črnac Tusta, the front man of the cult punk rock band called *KUD Idijoti* had been a worker and union leader at Uljanik until he got ill. The Uljanik club, one of cultural landmarks of Pula, also points to this important link between working class and industry on the one hand, and alternative culture of Pula on the other. Established in 1965, it is the oldest functioning club in the former Yugoslavia.

An Unwanted Heritage?

Three decades after the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the end of its socialism in the early 1990s, Pula, once a military and working-class city, is still in the process of contentious transformation in which several military and industrial facilities, complexes, and areas still wait for their

⁸ On the importance of rhythm as a concept that brings together space and time in urban spaces (Lefebvre, 2004).

new functions and new owners. The professionalization of the military and NATO membership resulted in a radical reduction of military infrastructure in the post-Yugoslav Croatia. In Pula, most facilities that used to belong to the Yugoslav People's Army lost their military function. Some centrally located spaces and buildings were given a new function: the Vladimir Gortan military base became a bus terminal, and the Vladimir Širola base – a seminary and a home for retired Catholic priests. The largest Pula barracks, Karlo Rojc, are now a cultural center and home to several civil society organizations and alternative groups. This enormous complex radically changed its look – the new residents redecorated it and painted the walls with graffiti, the exercise ground was turned into a skateboard park, and the rooms where JNA soldiers used to sleep, eat, listen to ideological courses and acquire various military skills became radio studios, offices, and galleries.

The former military complex Katarina, in turn, “replete with disintegrating buildings and thick undergrowth,” although “the land has been purchased and a repurposing is planned,” is left “to its own devices” (Hodges, 2019). There, “people cycle, make barbecues, walk dogs, smoke joints, socialize in the warm summer evenings, and attend music concerts” among “the Yugoslav and Austro-Hungarian era barracks stripped of their contents and graffitied” (Hodges, 2019). Two largest areas that significantly defined Pula's liminal urbanity – the Uljanik shipyard and the vast green area of the Muzil peninsula – still remain closed to the public and their status is unresolved. At Muzil, this has been the case since 2007, when the Croatian military decided to close the base (Falski, 2019). The same is true for the large area of the Uljanik shipyard, stretching along the city's waterfront; Uljanik's last employee was dismissed from his job in 2019. These empty, large, centrally located areas and buildings are subject to different, and contentious, visions of urban planning, and a site of conflict between the ongoing touristification of Croatia, characterized by “uncontrolled development of tourism,” and the interests of the local community, which can be subsumed under the notion of “the right to the city” (Falski, 2019).

Following the withdrawal of the military from the city and a dramatic decline of the industry, practices and discourses of “official self-representation” (Herzfeld, 2005) were not only directed toward the repurposing of the abandoned areas and change of their ownership, but also insisted on the idea that Pula – after the long presence of the military and the heavy industry, which limited and hindered the city's “natural development” – needs a radically new start, reorganization, rebranding, and “re-programming” that reach far beyond the domain of urban planning. This was particularly apparent in Pula's bid for the title of European Cultural

Capital in 2020,⁹ which was prepared in 2016 by the team Pula+2020. In the application, the vast military and industrial areas in the urban space are identified as the principal reason behind the sense of disconnectedness and disempowerment among local citizens and behind their lack of will to take action:

We looked at the space of our city, where 30% of the city's surface is closed off with razor-wire as former military areas and fortresses which are not accessible to citizens. We looked at our largest industrial site, the shipyard Uljanik, surrounded by walls that keep the citizens of Pula from seeing the sea from most vantage points in the city centre – let alone drink a cup of coffee on a promenade like in other smaller cities by the sea. So in Pula we can say that people are excluded from their own city, at least from large parts of it. And why? Because it is still militarised – and for us this means not only closed up military structures with walls and fences, but it is also the mind-set of institutionalised thinking, of borders that are built up by bureaucracy and politics to keep out citizens, of discouraged participation, of blocked potential to live and think, take action and become engaged in the social and democratic shaping of Pula, Istria, Croatia, and Europe as a whole. (Pula+2020, 2016, p. 12)

Since militarization had been identified as the main problem of Pula and its inhabitants, demilitarization became the central aim for the authors of Pula's application. This is also stressed by the title of the document (*Demilitarize! From Fortress to Forum*) and an image of a group of young people playing volleyball over a razor-wire fence on the bidbook cover. However, the liberal views of Pula's past and present that shaped the application failed to recognize several problems the cultural project of demilitarization (and deindustrialization) would entail.

First, the walls of former military and industrial complexes may prevent Pula's citizens from enjoying a coffee with a view, but having a job (to pay for that coffee in the first place) is much more important to thousands in this working-class city. "Drinking a cup of coffee on a promenade like in other smaller cities by the sea" is certainly not very high on the wish list of all those who lost their jobs in Uljanik in 2018 and 2019. It is a privilege for tourists rather than locals struggling for basic existence. Although Pula's application for the title of European Cultural Capital had been drafted too early to witness massive rallies in 2018, when local citizens and Uljanik's workers protested against closing the shipyard, it still ignored the immense

⁹ Pula's application was unsuccessful – the title of European Cultural Capital was awarded to Rijeka, another multicultural, coastal, post-industrial city in Croatia, which, unlike Pula, put the emphasis on promoting the working-class, industrial legacy of the city. This orientation was particularly visible in the opening ceremony, with *Opera Industriale*, directed by Dalibor Matanić, as its central part for a video recording of the opening see Grad Rijeka, n.d.

importance the residents of Pula attach to the industry and its important role in the shaping of social, political and cultural identity of the city.

Second, the “demilitarization” of former military areas along the coast in the city would hardly make them more accessible to the citizens. While the Pula+2020 project seemingly places the inhabitants of the city in the focus of interest, insisting on their engagement “in the social and democratic shaping of Pula, Istria, Croatia, and Europe as a whole,” this vision of “demilitarized” Pula offers an idealized image that addresses the tourists much more than the local community.¹⁰ Now the shipyard is closed, they would, in all probability, be subject to the logic of the capital, just like most of the vast shipyard area and preferably turned into high-end tourist facilities. This trend was apparent already in 2009, when a newspaper article mentioned the ambitions of local authorities to turn the site of the former military complex Muzil into “a luxurious holiday facility with a golf course” (“Tvornice radnicima, kasarne građanima”, 2009). A decade later, citizen and activist initiatives such as Volim Pulu still fight for an urban planning that would include visions and needs of the citizens (Falski, 2019, p. 139).

The text of the application for the title of European Cultural Capital suggests that the necessary radical reorganization of the urban space and its de-militarization not only concerns the physical space of the city and the objects defining it, but is also aimed at changing the mindset of the inhabitants. The application points to *tapija* as Pula’s principal problem. According to the authors, *tapija* is “the social passivity that develops on feelings of having little hope and even less power to change things, [which] expresses itself in a refusal to take decisions into our own hands” (Pula+2020, 2016, p. 5) and is a consequence of the city’s long-lasting militarization.

Tapija, a specific urban mood of non-pretentiousness and peripherality as well as a particular economy of time, was profoundly described and explored in Andrea Matošević’s recent study on Pula (Matošević, 2021). The phenomenon of *tapija* is specific for Pula, but it can be understood as a manifestation of a Mediterranean melancholy. It encompasses a range of meanings revolving around feelings of boredom, *ennui*, alienation, lack of prospect, and stillness.¹¹ These twentieth- and twenty-first-century feelings verbalized in discourses on *tapija* are a modern variety of an old

¹⁰ Similarly, “visiting the website of the Istrian Tourist Board (<https://www.istra.hr/en>), four elements spring to mind: the sea, historic buildings, olive oil and truffles. Not to be seen are factories, cranes, mines, and warehouses, and the people who used to work there or still do. In that, Istria fits in the self-image of the Adriatic region as a whole, which promotes the holy trinity of sun-sea-traditions” (*The Project*, n.d.).

¹¹ Etymologically, *tapija* is a loanword from the Ottoman Turkish, meaning a (property) document, a legal contract showing bond (“*Tapija*”, n.d.).

and persistent perception of Pula as a place that is liminal, still, boring, empty of life and away from important paths.

According to the authors of Pula's application for the title of European Cultural Capital, *tapija* is a "mentality" that needs to be eliminated, a mode of behavior that has to be changed in the process of de-militarization of the city and its inhabitants. In this kind of discourse, the remnants of the military and industrial presence in Pula fit the recognizable tropes of the *unwanted heritage* discourse. According to Sharon Macdonald, the "undesirable heritage"¹² includes "physical remnants of the past eras that represent values most of the contemporary society does not wish to be identified with, despite the understanding of the fact that they form an integral part of its history" (Macdonald, 2006, p. 11). This negative label became particularly frequent in the heritage-related policy and academic texts that refer to phenomena in European post-socialist societies and are closely related to their quest to "remake" themselves and "to construct a new national self-image" (Light, 2001, p. 59). However, as no negotiation or promotion of heritage is a neutral process, neither is categorizing or treating specific elements of the past as unwanted heritage.¹³ Although it claims to reflect general attitudes and preferences, it is inevitably partial, placed within the ideological processes of othering, and the logic of economic interest. It is a form of an authorized heritage discourse (Smith, 2006) that homogenizes the views of the past and assesses it through seemingly "inherent" and "eternal" values (Wollentz et al., 2019, p. 198), and as such is inevitably exclusive and insensitive to the complexity, fluidity, internal dynamics and ambiguous processes of meaning-making. Such authoritative understanding of heritage, as Wollentz et al. argue (Wollentz et al., 2019, p. 198), also fails to recognize that "heritage is creating values, [and] it is not a created value" (see also Solli et al., 2011).

Conclusion: For an Inclusive Understanding of Heritage

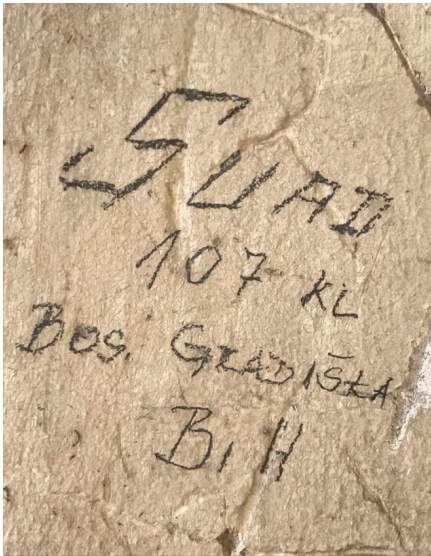
Pula's military and industrial heritage is perceived by citizens as closely related to their city's multicultural and working-class tradition. As I have illustrated above, military life and civilian life have never been totally isolated from each other; they were intertwined in complex and manifold

¹² In the societies of the former Yugoslavia, the term *unwanted heritage* has been attached to the modernist monuments of the WWII antifascist struggle (see Dusek, 2017; Škorić, 2016), many of which were destroyed in the 1990s. In Poland, socialist modernist architecture has also been labelled "badly-born heritage" (Ciarkowski, 2017; Springer, 2012).

¹³ See Ciarkowski, 2017 and his discussion of Polish socialist modernist architecture.

ways, and their intertwinement resulted in cultural and everyday forms and patterns of the local urbanity. Also today, in the aftermath of socialism, in former military spaces and facilities that have already acquired new functions and meanings, the old and the new coexist in complex and subtle ways. At the main entrance to the Karlo Rojc Cultural Center, formerly the largest JNA barracks in Pula (and the largest building in the city), there is a plaque marking the presence of the technical school students in the period between 1946 and 1953. Inside, in the hallway on the ground floor, there are enlarged photos of the Navy school students. The memory of JNA soldiers, to whom this complex “belonged” between 1976 and 1991, is not a result of a post-intervention in memorialization - but traces of the JNA are still visible: soldiers’ names, names of the places they were from, and the numbers of their classes, scratched on the walls during long hours on duty, can still be seen there today under layers of paint. On the last floor, a bit away from the visitors’ gaze, there is still original decoration from the JNA left – an act by which the present residents of this space acknowledge its history. Outside walls of this enormous building are richly painted with graffiti, unambiguously signaling its present-day character of an alternative cultural center. Among the paintings, a portrait of Branko Črnac Tusta stands out. The image of Pula’s cultural icon and former Uljanik worker on the walls of the old barracks subtly points to the blend of the presence of the military and heavy industry, working-class ethos and intense alternative culture that defined Pula as an urban space in the second half of the twentieth century.





Figures 1–3: Walls of the Karlo Rojc Cultural Center.
 Photos by Boris Koroman (1) and Tanja Petrović (2, 3).

The authors of Pula’s application for the title of European Cultural Capital ignored not only the concrete materiality reflecting the working-class tradition and rich cultural production that existed in this liminal, military and industrial city during socialism. They also ignored the fact that local citizens often saw the past in which the industry was thriving and the JNA was omnipresent as a period when Pula was a “real city” (Matošević, 2021, p. 51, n. 51). Apart from this, they failed to notice an inherent discrepancy of their own depiction of Pula as a passive, static, uncreative place where people lack initiative and feel disempowered – all this because of *tapija* caused by militarization (and industrialization) of the city – on the one hand, and the emphasis they put on their own description of Pula’s alternative culture on the other: “Pula is the city where young energy bursts behind every corner. It is well known for its punk and underground culture, alternative music, long tradition of activism and resistance, and a small but vibrant and cohesive artistic scene” (Pula+2020, 2016, p. 10).

Pula’s liminality was significantly defined by the presence of the military and heavy industry in the city in the second half of the twentieth century. This liminality continues to shape the city’s self-perception. The complicated, uneasy relationship between the city and the spaces that do not fully belong to its citizens has opened possibilities for an alternative to dominant discourses, politics, and practices, for critique and change,

offering means for creativity and engagement. In this light, the liminality resulting from this complex relationship unfolds not as a problem that needs to be overcome, as something that blocks “potential to live and think,” but as the very space of living and thinking in this Istrian city. It also calls for a more inclusive (Kisić, 2016; Wollentz et al., 2019) approach to Pula’s military and industrial heritage, one that would be capable of addressing and reflecting dynamic processes of negotiation of different views, histories and memories, production of values, and meaning-making.

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Nasleđe liminalnosti: tragovi prisustva vojske u istarskom gradu Puli posle kraja jugoslovenskog socijalizma

Članak se bavi liminalnošću koja u značajnoj meri oblikuje (samo) percepciju grada Pule u Hrvatskoj, a nastala je kao rezultat dugotrajnog prisustva vojske (i teške industrije) u ovom gradu. U njemu raspravljam o modalitetima kohabitacije Jugoslovenske narodne armije i građana Pule, koji su zajedno živeli i delili urbani prostor u periodu jugoslovenskog socijalizma, i osvetljam posledice ove kohabitacije, deljenja i uzajamnosti vidljive u vreme nakon kraja jugoslovenskog socijalističkog projekta.

U ambivalentnom procesu urbane transformacji Pule koji se upravo odvija, dok mnogi vojni i industrijski objekti, kompleksi i prostori još uvek čekaju na novu namenu i vlasnike, gradske vlasti i snovaoci urbane politike „vojni” identitet grada i njegovu liminalnost identifikuju kao problem: materijalni i nematerijalni tragovi prisustva vojske u gradu označavaju se kao “neželjena baština”. Nasuprot viđenju pulske vojne (i industrijske) baštine kao problema koji treba prevazići/eliminirati, u članku se zalažem za inkluzivniji pristup koji uzima u obzir činjenicu da građani Pule ovo nasleđe usko povezuju sa multikulturnim i radničkim identitetom grada, i koji prepoznaje potencijal tog nasleđa da proizvodi značenja, vrednosti, istorije i sećanja.

Ključne reči: Pula, armija, liminalno, baština, socijalizam.

Dziedzictwo liminalności: znaki obecności wojska w Puli na Istrii po upadku jugosłowiańskiego socjalizmu

Artykuł porusza kwestię liminalności w znacznym stopniu kształtującą (auto)percepcję miasta Pula w Chorwacji, co jest skutkiem wieloletniej obecności wojska (i przemysłu ciężkiego) w tym mieście. W tekście omawiam kwestię współdzielenia przestrzeni miejskiej w okresie jugosłowiańskiego socjalizmu przez Jugosłowiańską Armię Ludową i mieszkańców miasta, analizuję również skutki owej kohabitacji i współpracy widoczne w okresie po upadku jugosłowiańskiego projektu socjalistycznego. W trakcie wciąż trwającego ambiwalentnego procesu transformacji przestrzeni miejskiej Puli wiele obiektów, kompleksów i miejsc militarnych oraz przemysłowych oczekuje na zmianę przeznaczenia i nowych właścicieli, tymczasem władze miejskie oraz twórcy polityki miejskiej za podstawowy problem uznają „wojskową” tożsamość miasta i jej liminalność: materialne i niematerialne ślady obecności armii w mieście określane są jako „niechciane dziedzictwo”. Wbrew powszechnemu traktowaniu owego dziedzictwa jako problemu do rozwiązania, w swoim artykule wybieram podejście bardziej otwarte, które uwzględnia zdanie mieszkańców Puli wpisujących je w wielokulturową i robotniczą tożsamość miasta; staram się również podkreślić jego potencjał w procesie wytwarzania znaczeń, wartości, historii i pamięci.

Słowa kluczowe: Pula, wojsko, dziedzictwo, liminalność, socjalizm.

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