

Architectural Heritage: an Important Element of Identity in the Karst Region of Slovenia

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Slovenia's independence and the creation of a new state encouraged a renewed formation, reinforcement and expression of national identity. Encounters with globalization, consumer society and transnationalization have also contributed to this process, which, among other things, emphasizes regional and local community. In Slovenia these changes have led to a revaluation of old and formation of new identification signs – symbols which enable the self-expression and affiliation either to individuals or to local communities. The author analyses the issues of national and regional identity symbols by manipulating collective memory and heritage. The paper shows how architectural heritage has become an important identification sign for regional identity in the Karst region of Slovenia. It is based on author's field research.

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During the 1990s Slovenia was faced with a number of sociopolitical changes which drastically changed its citizens' way of life: independence and the emergence of a new national state; the problems associated with economic transition; preparations for membership in the EU and eventual entry; the gradual encounter with the consumer culture of the West; and last but not least, dealing with the processes of globalization. The consequences of these rapid changes can still be felt today in the economy, politics, and culture. Independence and the creation of a new nation brought with it a need to reinforce and express national identity, and, within this, local identities, both in Slovenia and abroad. Particularly in times of crisis, a crucial role in the construction of group identity, including in its national, regional, and local manifestations, is played by the interpretation of the past and collective memory. The key defining features of any social identity are historical *continuity*, which is passed from generation to generation, and recognition of *difference* (diversity), which is in a constant

process of definition through interactions with others. Regarding continuity, nationalism theorist Anthony Smith emphasizes how important it is for each successive generation to have a feeling of continuation, of continuity, for shared recollections of past events and for the representation of a common fate which is maintained by each generation (Smith 1991: 25). In any community, whether national, regional, or local, there co-exist a number of interpretations of the past, all of them equal until one is appointed by authority discourse and becomes the only legitimate truth about the past, or, in other words, becomes the official history. In many places it has happened, especially after revolutionary transformations, that certain interpretations of past events, or the valuing of certain creations by one's predecessors, no longer suit the new political or ideological social context (Jezernik 2004: 8). This has also happened in Slovenia. Interpreting the past, or rather manipulating collective memory, is an integral part of the discourse of creating a state, since the function of memory, as David Lowenthal has put it, is not to preserve the past but to use it to embellish and manipulate the present (Lowenthal 1985: 210). The past is to be legalized and used to elevate the present, and allow us, in a modern and unpredictable world plagued by problems of global scale, to inhabit the safe and the familiar. However, modern views have more often than not robbed this interpretation of its symbolic value. We respect it only because of its historic charm; we are not capable of accepting the messages mediated by our predecessors (Lowenthal 1985: 17). To the extent that materials for the construction of a common identity are lacking, it sometimes happens that traditions are invented, as Eric Hobsbawm explains, whose continuity with the past is mostly superficial, since they are in fact responses to new situations, and which take shape by appealing to old situations or establish their own past through quasi-obligatory repetition (Hobsbawm 1993: 2).

This article explores the expression of regional identity in the Karst region of Slovenia since that nation's independence in 1991. By means of specific examples from my field research¹, I first explain the construction and the rise of Slovenian national identity under the changing political, economical and cultural circumstances over the past sixty years. In addition, I outline how the

¹ I have been doing research in the Karst region since 2003, when I started my Ph. D. studies. Based on the modern theory of identity, the doctoral research focuses mainly on an analysis of the changing attitudes of the local people of the Karst region towards their heritage, as experienced under different social and political systems. My intention is to present the importance of heritage in the reconstruction of local and, therefore, also national identity. In addition, I hope to examine the importance of preserving local and national identity in the process of transnational countries in modern global society and suggest ways of raising awareness among local people of the importance of discovering their heritage so as to be able to preserve and build on it in the future.

elements and knowledge of our predecessors, which today contribute to the construction of our collective memory and heritage have become symbols for interpreting regional identity. The examples are based on architectural heritage in a local community in the Karst region. I also try to explain how the attitude toward heritage has changed as experienced under different social and political systems. In conclusion I outline the reasons why people in some local communities recognize the importance of their heritage as a value and in other cases unappreciated their collective memories.

The Rise of the Slovenian National Identity: the Historical Background, Independency and Globalization Processes

The beginnings of the shaping of Slovene national identity could be said to date from the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. This was when efforts began within the Austro-Hungarian Empire for greater national cohesion, shared culture, and, later, political independence. Throughout history Slovene national identity was repeatedly buffeted by minor and major crises (e.g., the period of fascism, the Second World War, and so on), which demanded greater mobilization, homogeneity and self-confidence from its proponents. The feeling that national identity was threatened, which was expressed in political, economic, and cultural problems, was also on display during the Yugoslavia period, and in the mid-1980s this resulted in an increasing emphasis on "Sloveneness." Yugoslavia's centralized policy, based on a class and internationalist reduction of the diverse nations within its borders, was to suppress national identities and construct a common Yugoslav culture based on the slogan "brotherhood and equality." Slovene intellectuals (predominantly writers) were the first to resist this notion. They were joined later by politicians, who became intensively involved in the formation of an independent Republic of Slovenia organized along democratic lines. Because identity, especially in periods of crisis, is grounded in and reconstructed on collective memory, Slovene national identity at the end of the 1980s, and even more in the 1990s, began to be defined and established on the basis of a renewed appreciation for rural qualities. In the past, most Slovenes numbered among the folk, peasant population, while educated intellectuals were always a minority. But despite the efforts of Slovenes in the 20th century to transcend their peasant origins, since farmers were invariably exploited, subordinated, and humiliated, consciousness of the rural life remained a powerful factor and identifying characteristic for the definition of Sloveneness (Kučan 1998: 62). In addition, with Slovenia's political independence, Slovene national identity tried to assert

itself based on a contrast with life in the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia, emphasizing the history of the way of life from before the Second World War, when farming was the main economic activity for most Slovenes.

Here it should not be overlooked that a renewed appreciation for the rural life and environment, and for the natural and cultural properties of village life, is a consequence not only of the sociopolitical changes connected with Slovenia's independence, but also of the encounter with postmodernist consumer society, which, due to globalization processes and the development of technology, has come to value the unspoiled rural landscape and the preservation of the natural and cultural features left to us by our predecessors. However, in contrast to the period when Slovenia was becoming independent, in which there was an exaggerated emphasis on Slovene national identity and Slovene typicality (even though this was based largely on myths), the encounter with consumer society, globalization and also the new transnational quality of Europe has led to an appreciation of regional/local identities and the construction of such identities. Why? As contemporary theorists of global processes and postmodern society (Rizman 2001; Erjavec 1996; Beck 2003; Jameson 2001) point out, two contradictory processes characterize modern consumer society: the first represents the expansion of the market and increasingly greater globalization, while the second, which is dependent on the first, creates an existential feeling of loss of personal identity, a feeling of alienation and loss of human individuality, caused by a capitalism directed towards the production of goods (Erjavec 1996: 8). Because the individual in a developed information society feels "naked and barefoot," they begin to look more to smaller local communities as a source of support, and less to states or large transnational corporations, and they are always redefining and constructing themselves in interaction with others ("foreigners"). Theorists stress that the state as a political community in transnational movements and global processes is, on the surface at least, losing meaning, and hence the feeling of belonging to a national community is gradually eroding and being replaced with a stronger feeling of affiliation with a local/regional, ethnic or religious community. However, we are still far away from being able to say that local, regional or perhaps transnational (for example European) identity is supplanting national identity, since the latter always reflects greater social responsiveness and capability (with the help of state institutions) in homogenizing, actualizing, and mobilizing subjects. However, as globalization theorist Ulrich Beck explains, the discovery of local characteristics does not mean simply a "renaissance of the local," since the frame of reference in which the meaning of the local is expressed has changed. Local characteristics are placed in a global framework through translocal

exchange, dialogue and conflict, and it is in this global context that they are also renewed, often conflictingly (Beck 2003: 71–72).

There has been increased interest in Slovenia in researching the heritage and preserving and restoring articles created by earlier generations, as evidenced in, among other things, a widespread network of new private museums (thematic museums, village museums, regional museums and so on), projects by primary school children, and development projects administered by local municipalities and village communities (often with financing contributed by the European Union), whose programs include researching the past and incorporating local heritage into modern life. All this has served to calm the initial fears of many which arose during the preparations for EU membership: to wit, that contact with a number of economically more powerful countries would erode national and local identity. It has gradually become clear that transnational associations and globalization itself do not mean supraterritoriality, universalization, westernization and liberalization, but rather that contacts with “foreigners” contribute to an increased awareness of one’s own national and local identity (Rizman 2001: 43) and thus to the rise of localism or rather local characteristics (language, architecture, cuisine, religious practices, and so on). The European Union, through a wide range of development projects aimed at the regional integration of neighboring states, has recognized, encouraged, and made possible cultural diversity.

Global processes, especially the spread of capitalist consumer society, have stimulated research and preservation of unique cultural traits not only for the identification of nations and local character, but also for the exploitation of heritage as a commodity, where culture is subordinated to the logic of capital and the market typical of postmodern society (Jameson 2001: 25, 26). We are thus witnessing the development of what could be called a heritage industry. Heritage is being used primarily in the tourism industry (for promotional brochures, thematically connected points along a route, tourist and cultural festivals, souvenirs) and, increasingly, in architectural design. It is typical of postmodern architecture for traditional architectural creations and styles to be used as a guide in the planning and design of new buildings or the renovation of existing structures and sites. The field of architecture provides some of the most illustrative examples of the influence of sociopolitical changes. Architecture also plays a prominent and meaningful role in the definition of regional/local identity in the modern global world. Thus the remainder of this article is devoted to providing evidence for this thesis using the example of the Karst, which represents its own geographic, climatic, and cultural region among the diverse and variegated landscapes of Slovenia.

The Karst Region and its Architectural Heritage between the Past and the Present

The Karst is a limestone plateau region of southwestern Slovenia extending into northeastern Italy. It is located in the hinterland of the Bay of Trieste, where the Adriatic Sea curves into the land. Most of the Karst region is situated in Slovenia on an area of 429 square kilometers, and has a population of about 19,000 people. It is famous for its natural karst features, especially the underground world of numerous caves, dolines, sinkholes, poljes, uvalas (poljes with tilted bottoms), blind valleys above swallow holes of streams, dry valleys and various other karst phenomena. Abounding with all these characteristic karst features, Slovenia's karst region is the cradle of the world's scientific study of karst phenomena.

The stony landscape, the mixture of Mediterranean and continental climates, the powerful northeast bora wind (*burja*), which blows down from the karst plateaus to the Bay of Trieste and scarcity of fertile soil caused the specific way of life for the Karst people. The identity of Karst villages used to be defined by the unique architectural structure of the village and its houses, shaped in harmony with the natural environment and the economic activities of the local population, who made a living primarily from various agricultural activities (livestock husbandry, crop-farming, wine-growing). The first Karst villages were built on unfertile areas. They were crowded and tightly packed with narrow roads. Houses were built facing south, with their closed-off backs to the northern (windy) side. The residential and agricultural parts of the stone buildings were arranged within a courtyard enclosed by high stone walls. Entrance to the house was through a portal consisting of a "kaluna" (an arch made of stone) and a "portun" (wooden doors). Artistically carved kalunas represented the owner's identity and defined his status and reputation. The kalunas were always characterized by the carved name of the owner, religious symbols and flowers. The principal activities of the farm were carried out in the courtyard. Farm buildings and living quarters were built around the courtyard. Due to the specific climatic conditions and the shortage of interior space, Karst houses were typically built with small windows, small rooms, and exterior staircases to the upper story. Every courtyard of any size had its own well to supply drinking water to the residents (Figure 1).

Major changes in valuing the traditional architectural heritage occurred after the Second World War. The implementation of new economic policies, which privileged the development of industry at the expense of agriculture, and new modernist architectural styles completely devalued the traditional Karst architecture. The old Karst house, which used to be associated with



Figure 1. Typical Karst homestead belonging to the Grmek family in the village of Kobjeglava, as photographed in the year 1940 (From the archives of the Grmek family, Kobjeglava)

agriculture, was no longer functional. Livelihoods were earned not from farming but from industry, and this led to the abandonment of cultivation of the land and changes in the functions of houses. Two contradictory processes began to take shape: on the one hand, the abandonment of agriculture, and on the other hand the growth of building activity. Moreover, under the new political ideology of socialism, the preservation of traditional peasant culture came to symbolize poverty and backwardness. The new socialist ideology, as part of the construction of a new Yugoslav identity in the spirit of “brotherhood,” suppressed the expression of unique identifying characteristics in local architecture.

This, along with the development of the construction industry and the rise of a different lifestyle, led to the neglect and destruction of typical Karst architecture and the introduction of new architectural forms and town planning which were completely out of place in the rural environment. This “negative attitude” towards the identifying features of Karst architecture was seen in the abandonment and destruction of old houses and the construction of new, larger ones using modern materials and designs that clashed with the Karst architecture from before the Second World War. At the same time, construction standards were more supportive of investments in new construction than in the maintenance and renovation of existing buildings. There was also the widespread conviction that only eccentrics and collectors of antiques would concern themselves with the renovation of old farmhouses, apart from various societies for the preservation of cultural heritage, which were specifically established to protect existing buildings with cultural value. The renovation process was also regarded as extremely expensive, challenging, and complicated, a project which most people found too daunting to want to take on. The increasing reliance on motorized vehicles (cars, tractors, trucks) and the need to accommodate such traffic led to the demolition of some traditional architectural features of homesteads (wooden doors, exterior walls, religious shrines) and their replacement by new elements such as iron gates and small



Figure 2. The entrances to the Pušcer and Kenk homesteads in the village of Kobjegala, built before WW 2. The picture was taken in the year 1940. (Grmek family archives, Kobjeglava).

outbuildings, which completely changed the appearance of village streets and squares (Figure 2). As the financial situations of residents improved in the 1960s and 1970s, the building policy of the time permitted the construction of new houses, more often than not on prime farmland, outside the former boundaries of nucleated villages. New construction was undertaken in a sprawling and haphazard manner, completely changing the formerly tightly clustered structure of the settlement. Moreover, the new policy dictated, in keeping with modern architectural trends, a new type of residential dwelling: the so-called “box house” reminiscent of suburbs. These new houses were built in the middle of a surrounding open area and this in turn changed the former compact appearance of villages (Lah 1994: 16, 17).

Older houses were left to decay over time or were converted to non-residential agricultural uses. These new building patterns have altered the traditional character of villages and are causing the Karst landscape to gradually lose its unique and recognizable features.

Initial steps towards a renewed valuation of the traditional characteristics of the architectural heritage were taken in the 1980s. During this time, experts became aware that the destruction of old buildings meant the loss of cultural, historical, aesthetic and other values which contribute to identity. This problem was also taken up by international organizations such as UNESCO and the Council of Europe. However, the most significant changes in architecture in practice, by proprietors of architectural heritage, were made in the 1990s. This was due partly to new policies based on a renewed appreciation of Slovene national identity and local character. In the spirit of building a strong Slovene national community and reinforcing existing traditions as an integral part of national and local identity, and influenced by European policy, old Karst homes

renovated in the pre-war tradition, in harmony with the natural landscape, were once again valued and appreciated. Although the local inhabitants of the Karst do not like to admit it, the first people to build and restore houses in the traditional pre-war architectural style were outsiders who bought up properties in Karst villages for use as second homes. Only later did local residents follow their example. Outsiders have imparted to the local people a new consciousness based on protecting, valuing, and renovating architectural elements from the past. In the beginning, the outsiders were derided by the locals, but later they realized that the preservation of traditional architectural features of Karst homes represents a significant value in defining local identity and appreciating the local environment. But here it should be noted that these outsiders looked on the typical characteristics of Karst architecture as an aesthetic value; the purchase of a house in the Karst and the opportunity to spend weekends and holidays in an old renovated house in the country, away from the city, where perhaps they spent their childhood, represented for these owners a nostalgic reminder of the past, and a longing for "the good old days." In contrast, for the locals this architectural style, dating from before the Second World War, was considered nonfunctional with respect to a modern way of life (small windows and rooms, exterior access to the upper story, etc.). For this reason they continued to prefer new construction, but adorned these new houses, as well as ones built in the 1970s and 1980s, with traditional Karst architectural features, such as portals consisting of a stone archway (*kaluna*) and solid wood gates (*portun*), wells, high stone walls enclosing the courtyard, stone consoles supporting balconies, etc. These elements no longer reflect the function of shielding the residential and agricultural structures from the elements that they had in the past, but are used mainly for aesthetic purposes and as identifying characteristics which convey an imaginary feeling of belonging to a specific local community – that of the Karst region. The inhabitants of the Karst express their local affiliation and group identity through the visual appearance of the houses they live in (Figure 3).

Thus these architectural elements can be regarded as symbols of identity which, as social anthropologist Anthony Cohen has defined them, consist of various elements and ideas that are shared by people in the same community but whose interpretation and meaning varies from one individual to another. Each meaning that a member of a community ascribes to a given symbol is linked to the experience of that individual. Through the expression of other meanings the form of the symbol is usually preserved and shared, while the meaning is transformed (Cohen 1985: 20, 21). In the case of architecture, in the



Figure 3. Recently constructed house with old, traditional entrances to courtyard, built after Slovenia's independence. The house is located in the Karst village called Škrbina. (Foto: Jasna Fakin Bajec, September 2004)

past certain architectural features of Karst houses (for example, the portal entrance to and high walls surrounding the courtyard) expressed a certain function – for example, shielding the house from harsh climatic and geographical conditions (the *burja* and very hot summers) as well as protecting personal property, particularly water). And local residents of the Karst also interpreted these things in light of their primary function. Today, due to new architectural trends, modern technology, and architectural development they no longer perform this function but nevertheless represent an aesthetic element, and an identifying symbol of the Karst, in new construction. Usually, the form of these symbols (such as the shape of the portal with its “kaluna” stone arch and “portun” wooden gates leading into the courtyard) has been preserved among the members of a community, but it does not have a common, unified meaning.

Conclusion

Thus, due to changing sociopolitical conditions and, resultantly, a different valuing and interpretation of the heritage, as well as due to the encounter with European and global social movements (globalization and postmodern society), in Slovenia there has been a resurgence of interest in and representation of regional identity. In the case presented here I would not say that globalization and transnational integration have caused the merging together local Karst culture with mass culture, but rather the opposite. I agree with Ulrich Beck that the discovery of the collective memory does not mean simply a “renaissance of the local” and that we cannot avoid absorbing some things from a global environment, but the ideas of selection is decided at the local level. Moreover, the EU, by providing financing for development projects, encourages local authorities and smaller communities to appreciate their collective memory and represent their heritage. The collective memory and heritage are critically important for the preservation, reconstruction and foundation of regional/local identity, but its interpretation depends on the individual and, especially, on political discourse. Thus it is important for experts who research collective memory and heritage to be as objective as possible in their work, to be authentic and to alert people to the possibility of manipulation. For this reason, research on the role of heritage in local communities is welcome and legitimate. In the course of my research I realized that heritage has a key role in defining and creating a community’s identity. I also recognized that the heritage established by a given community and passed from one generation to another is not only of historical, but also developmental, significance, as a basis for formulating a vision and a strategy for the development of tourism and in renovating houses. In my research I also focused on the relationship between heritage and the prevailing political ideology and found out that in the Karst region as well as throughout Slovenia, attitudes towards heritage have changed under the influence of different social and political systems. During the period of socialist Yugoslavia, the preservation of traditional peasant culture came to symbolize backwardness, poverty and a hard life for local rural communities. Karst rural architectural heritage features represented undeveloped, poverty and rural deprivation of that. After Slovenia’s independence, people sought out their cultural roots and renewed their appreciation for traditional elements from the period before the Second World War. This has been reflected in and reinforced by the collection, organization, and display of documents, photographs and artefacts, the resurgence of old customs and habits, the construction and renovation of houses in keeping with local tradition, and so on. In my investigations I have often wondered why, despite the large number of

development projects, media discussion, and educational programs, the level of interest among the population varies so widely: in some village communities the local inhabitants are actively engaged in researching, preserving, and incorporating heritage into their modern way of life, while in others people (with a few rare exceptions) remain passive and uninterested. Drawing on Cohen's interpretation, that for the understanding of a given community one must always proceed from human experience of what a community means to its members, I can give a tentative answer: the members of these communities are not historically tied to their local communities and heritage does not represent something connecting them to the previous generation – since they are immigrants – or, rather, they do not share a common historical experience with the members of the community. Nevertheless these members feel a sense of belonging to a community and have a common identity, since it is only in this way that "other" members of the group can accept them into their community, which is a basic condition for the expression of one's own self, which defines one's personality and understanding of oneself as a unique individual.

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Architektūros paveldas: svarbus Slovėnijos Karsto rajono tapatybės elementas

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjama regioninės tapatybės raiška Slovėnijos Karsto rajone nuo nepriklausomybės paskelbimo 1991 m. Remdamasi lauko tyrimų konkrečiais pavyzdžiais, autorė pirmiausia paaiškina, kaip besikeičiančiomis politinėmis, ekonominėmis ir kultūrinėmis sąlygomis per pastaruosius šešiasdešimt metų buvo konstruojama ir stiprinama slovėnų tautinė tapatybė. Be to, autorė glaustai apibūdina, kaip pirmtakų darbai ir žinios, šiandien prisidedančios prie kolektyvinės atminties ir paveldo konstravimo, virto regioninės tapatybės interpretavimo simboliais. Pavyzdžių autorė semiasi iš Karsto rajono vietinės bendruomenės architektūros paveldo. Ji siekia paaiškinti, kaip keitėsi požiūris į paveldą veikiant skirtingoms socialinėms ir politinėms sistemoms. Pagaliau autorė įvardija priežastis, kodėl tam tikrų vietinių bendruomenių žmonės pripažįsta paveldą esant vertybe, o kai kurios bendruomenės keičia kolektyvines atmintis.

Slovėnijos naujos politinės nacijos sukūrimas skatino stiprinti ir atnaujinti tautinės, vadinasi, ir regioninės/vietinės tapatybės raišką. Socialinės tapatybės apskritai pagrindiniai apibrėžiantieji bruožai – tai iš kartos į kartą perduodamas istorinis tęstinumas ir skirtumų (įvairovės) pripažinimas, o tai iš esmės yra nepaliaujamai per sąveiką su kitais vykstantis savęs apibrėžimas. Kiekvienai kartai svarbu šį tęstinumą jausti, išlaikyti kolektyvinę atmintį ir turėti bendro likimo raišką.

Tapatybę, ypač kritiniais laikotarpiais, palaiko ir rekonstruoja kolektyvinės atminties interpretacija. Kolektyvinę atmintį tik iš dalies lemia individas, ji daugiausia priklauso nuo politinės valdžios. Politikai turi galios rašyti oficialiąją istoriją ir konstruoti ją iš naujų valstybinių simbolių.

Daugelyje vietų nutiko taip, kad tam tikri praeities įvykių aiškinimai ar pirmtakų tam tikrų kūrinių vertinimai jau neatitinka naujo politinio ar ideologinio socialinio konteksto. Šitaip po nepriklausomybės paskelbimo įvyko ir Slovėnijoje. Jugoslavijos politinė ideologija, palyginti su nepriklausomos Slovėnijos vėlesniosiomis politinėmis ideologijomis, vertino kitokius nacionalinio tapatumo valstybinius simbolius. Paskelbus nepriklausomybę, slovėnų tautinis tapatumas stengėsi išitvirtinti išnaudodamas kaip kontrastą buvusį gyvenimą Jugoslavijos Socialistinėje Federacinėje Respublikoje, iš naujo pabrėždamas gyvenimo, prasidėjusio prieš Antrąjį pasaulinį karą, istoriją.

Anksčiau slovėnai daugiausia buvo valstiečiai ir vertėsi iš esmės ūkininkavimu. Nors antrojoje XX a. pusėje buvo stengiamasi įveikti valstietišką kilmę pasitelkus socialistinės ekonomikos politiką, kuri daugiausia siekė stiprinti pramonę žemės ūkio sąskaita, kaimiškasis gyvenimas išliko galingas slovėniškumo veiksnys ir tapatumo bruožas. Vis dėlto nereikėtų išleisti iš akių to, kad iš naujo kilęs gėrėjimasis kaimo gyvenimu ir kaimiška aplinka – tai ne vien su Slovėnijos nepriklausomybe susijusių socialinių politinių pokyčių, bet ir susidūrimo su postmodernistine vartotojų visuomene padarinys.

Šiandien globalėjimo padarinius juntanti postmodernioji visuomenė palankiai vertina nesugadintą kaimišką kraštovaizdį ir iš mūsų pirmtakų paveldėtų gamtinių bei kultūrinių bruožų saugojimą, ji taip pat palankiai vertina regionines/vietines tapatybes ir jų konstravimą. Kadangi žmogus išplėtotoje globalioje visuomenėje jaučiasi nesaugus ir pasimetęs, jis ima dairytis mažesnių lokaliųjų/regioninių bendruomenių kaip paramos šaltinio ir stengiasi rinktis tapatumo ženklus iš vietinės istorijos. Slovėnijos Karsto rajono atvejis pateikiamas kaip atgijusio domėjimosi vietiniais bruožais ir vietine istorija pavyzdys, kai vietiniai žmonės įdeda daug pastangų stengdamiesi gaivinti siekį gėrėtis tradiciniais kultūros elementais, ypač architektūros bruožais.

Prieš Antrąjį pasaulinį karą Karsto kultūrinio kraštovaizdžio tapatumą apibrėždavo kaimų ir sodybų ypatinga architektūra, kurios raida atitiko gamtinės aplinkos bei vietos gyventojų ekonominės veiklos sąlygas. Po Antrojo pasaulinio karo Karsto rajono namų ir kaimų architektūros elementų tipinės charakteristikos ėmė nykti. Nykimą palaikė pramonei pirmenybę teikusi naujoji ekonominė politika, taip pat modernusis projektavimas, skatinęs laikytis naujesnio, miestietiško statybos stiliaus. Naujieji namai, vadinamosios „dėžutės“, paprastai būdavo statomi už tradicinių kaimo ribų, dažnai buvusiu ūkininkų žemėse. Nuvertinus senųjų namų tradicinę architektūrą, ją vis dažniau keisdavo labiau priemiesčiui būdingi architektūros bruožai.

Dešimtajame XX a. dešimtmetyje Slovėnijai tapus nepriklausoma, iš naujo susižavėta tradiciniais kultūriniais elementais. Architektūros plotmėje ši nuostata

atsispindėjo restauruojant senojo pobūdžio gyvenamuosius namus, išlaikant tradicinius Karsto rajonui būdingus statybos bruožus, taip pat naujus statinius papildant tradiciniais architektūros elementais. Susiprasti, kad senosios architektūros elementus reikia saugoti, vertinti ir atnaujinti, vietiniams žmonėms padėjo pašaliečiai. Tačiau reikėtų pažymėti, kad minėti architektūros elementai jau neatspindi senųjų funkcijų. Naudojami daugiausia dėl grožio, jie tėra tapatybę suteikiančios charakteristikos, išreiškiančios įsivaizduojamą jausmą, kad žmogus priklauso konkrečiai vietinei bendruomenei. Ėmus vėl šitaip palankiai vertinti kultūros paveldą, architektūros paveldas tapo svarbiu tapatybės elementu. Juo remdamiesi, Karsto rajono gyventojai gali apibrėžti, kas jie yra. O tai savo ruožtu yra svarbiausias dalykas siekiant apibrėžti nacionalinę savitumą integruotoje Europos Sąjungoje.

Gauta 2006 m. lapkričio mėn.

