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Everyday Nationhood and the Border(scape): Slovenian Istria and Italian Media Consumption

ABSTRACT: Thie article presents the intersection of everyday nationhood (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a) and borderland dynamics through the lens of media consumption in Slovenian Istria, a region bordering Italy and Croatia. Drawing on Fox and Miller-Idriss's (2008) framework of everyday nationhood and borderscapes theory (Brambilla 2014; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015; Krichker 2019), the study investigates the lived everyday social reality at the border, especially regarding the evocation of nation while engaging with transborder cultural flows. The research employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a telephone survey (N=715) with in-depth (life-history) interviews (N=30) conducted among the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria. Findings reveal a dual phenomenon: while respondents nationally predominantly identify as Slovenian, they simultaneously acknowledge the region's transcultural character in relation to the proximity of the Italian border and the cultural and social life across it. Italian media, particularly television, widely consumed especially, during the late 20th century, has shaped Istrians sensibilities, providing shared cultural references and interpretive communities among peers. The study demonstrates that media consumption serves as a mundane yet a significant practice through which borderland inhabitants enact, negotiate, and sometimes subvert nationalism's (puristic) frameworks. Despite recognising cultural similarities with Italians, respondents maintain distinct national self-identifications, revealing persistent 'mental borders' alongside lived transculturality. The article contributes to border studies by illustrating how everyday practices – in the case presented, particularly media consumption – reveal the fluidity and complexity of borders as lived spaces, challenging the naturalised equation of 'national territory' with 'national culture' while acknowledging the enduring salience of national frameworks in borderland identities.

Keywords: Everyday Nationhood; Borderscapes; Media Consumption; TV Consumption; Slovenian Istria; National Belonging; Transculturality

POVZETEK: Članek obravnava vsakdanjo nacionalnost (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a) v povezavi z dinamikami obmejnega območja skozi prizmo medijske potrošnje v slovenski Istri, območju ki meji na Italijo in Hrvaško. Študija, ki se opira na teoretični okvir vsakdanje narodnosti (ang. everyday nationhood) Fox in Miller-Idriss (2008) in mejnosti (angl. borderscapes) (Brambilla 2014; dell›Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015; Krichker 2019), raziskuje vsakodnevno živeto družbeno realnost na meji, zlasti

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v povezavi z vzpostavljanjem nacije ob srečevanju s (čez)mejnostjo. Raziskava uporablja kombinirani kvalitativno-kvantitativno mešani pristop, ki združuje telefonsko anketo (N=715) s poglobljenimi (življenjskimi) intervjuji (N=30), izvedenimi med prebivalci Slovenske Istre. Ugotovitve razkrivajo dvojni pojav: čeprav se respondenti nacionalno večinoma opredeljujejo kot Slovenci, hkrati prepoznavajo transkulturni značaj območja v povezavi z bližino italijanske meje ter kulturnim in družbenim življenjem prek nje. Italijanski mediji, zlasti televizija, ki so jih spremljali predvsem konec 20. stoletja, so oblikovali posebne občutke in dovzetnost, saj so zagotavljali skupne kulturne reference in interpretativne skupnosti med vrstniki. Študija dokazuje, da medijska potrošnja služi kot vsakdanja, vendar pomembna praksa, s katero prebivalci obmejnega območja udejanjajo, pogajajo in včasih tudi subvertirajo (puristične) okvire nacionalizma. Kljub prepoznavanju kulturnih podobnosti z Italijani anketirani ohranjajo jasne razmejitve nacionalne samoidentifikacije, kar razkriva trdovratne »mentalne meje« v živeti transkulturnosti. Članek prispeva k študijam mejnosti s ponazoritvijo, kako vsakdanje prakse – v predstavljenem primeru zlasti medijska potrošnja – razkrivajo fluidnost in kompleksnost meja kot živih prostorov, s čimer izzivajo naturalizirano enačenje »nacionalnega ozemlja« z »nacionalno kulturo«, hkrati pa prikazujejo, kakšno »(vz)trajno« vlogo imajo nacionalni okviri v obmejnih identifikacijah.

Ključne besede: vsakdanja narodnost, mejni prostori, medijska potrošnja, gledanje televizije, Slovenska Istra, nacionalna pripadnost, transkulturnost

Introduction[2]

Borders are part of our everyday lives – whether we live near a (national) border or not. However, living 'at the fringes' of the nation, the border becomes engrained in people's everyday experiences. It presents a multilayered and complex process that encompass dealing with the dominant national discourse(s) that collide with people's (trans)borders encounters. These processes produce specific representations, narrations, imaginations, interpretations, and cultural negotiations related to the border and the lived social life in its vicinity (Brambilla 2014, 28; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015, 7–8; Krichker 2019, 1226, 1233).

Therefore, even if borders are primarily thought of as barriers to national culture and belonging, the socio-cultural reality of borderland inhabitants is more complex. In relation to the vibrant social reality of the borderlands, the article will attempt to apply Fox and Miller Idriss's (2008a) concept of *everyday nationhood*. Everyday nationhood highlights that the nation is not just a top-down, elite project, but is enacted and embodied in mundane practices in everyday life of ordinary people. It

2 This article is published with a financial support of the Slovenian Re-search and Innovation Agency program Liminal Spaces: Areas of Cultural and Societal Cohabitation in the Age of Risk and Vulnerability (No P6-0279).

refers to the active, routine, and even unreflective ways people (re)produce, negotiate, and challenge the nation in their lives. Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) analytically distinguish four modalities of how everyday nationhood is enacted, namely talking, choosing, performing, and consuming the nation. Following on Fox and Miller Idriss's (2008a) quest, the article applies everyday nationhood to the borderland of Slovenian Istria and their inhabitant's narrations and (re)interpretations of the nation and national belonging, the border and practices and products coming beyond the border and their salience in people's everyday life. How does the nation and the border become meaningful idioms in Istrians' everyday life, and how? How does the border and the life beyond the border become significant in peoples' lives? Does media consumption play a role – and how? The article will with the focus on Italian and Slovenian media consumption and Istrians' interpretations in reproducing, negotiating, and subverting the nation in relation to their experience in living near the Italian border. Italian media, especially television, were in the past, from in the second half of the 20th century, but more prominently at the turn of the century, consumed almost equivalently as Slovenian (Zadel 2020). And media consumption is not just a trivial mundane activity, but constitutes imaginaries and offers shared cultural experience that stems from media content and meaning-making in their consumption and re-creative uses (Gillespie 1995), which are in turn important for building a sense of community.

Theoretical Framework

The Constructivists Turn to the 'Everyday' in Border Studies

Towards the end of the 20th century, the dominant understanding and study of borders changed. The long-standing tradition, the one based on the Westphalian tradition, which conceived borders as territorial delineation of the state's sovereignty, where borders were understood as static lines on the maps (with the exception of major shifts of power, such as those brought about by wars), was challenged by contemporary processes, which firstly accentuated the feeling of 'debordering'. Namely, the late 20th and early 21st centuries witnessed processes of accelerated

globalisation, transnational flows and major geopolitical shifts – such as the Fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Iron curtain, and the perceived borderlessness due to the expansion of the European Union and the implementation of the Schengen Area (Peña 2021; Jurić Pahor 2003) – which was later again subjected to restrictions and border securitisation, as for example during Covid-19 lockdowns and the fear of unwanted migrations, to name just a few recent examples. These shifts in border management already speak of dynamic and contested processes challenging the view of borders as 'natural', static, given and objective features. The territoriality approach focuses almost exclusively on the national and international scales, privileging the state as the primary actor – and obscuring the agency of individuals and communities in the everyday (re) production of border spaces.

The traditional, 'Westphalian' framework coincided with the prevailing political principle of nationalism, which presupposes the correspondence of political and cultural unity, or rather, represents a theory of political legitimacy that presupposes or strives to match ethnic and political boundaries (Gellner 2008; see also Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a; Smith 1995; Welsch 1999. Consequently, we have learnt to think within its exclusionary frameworks, which are based on an understanding of culture as ethicised, externally bounded, and internally homogeneous (Welsch 1999). Culture (in the socio-anthropological term) is often defined precisely as ethnic, tribal or national culture; it is understood as the binding agent and essential substance of a particular people or nation, which distinguishes it from the cultures of other peoples or nations (Ní Éigeartaigh and Berg 2010). Culture is thus confined to a specific group bounded by group's borders, where the border contains the 'insurmountable cultural differences' of each group (Welsch 1999, 2001; Barth 1998; Šumi 2000; Kraidy 2005; Berg and Ní Éigeartaigh 2010). The cultures, in this understanding, are internally homogeneous on one hand, and bounded from others on the other (Welsch 1999, 2001).

Nevertheless, as Peña (2021) notes, the understanding of congruency of political and cultural unit presents a model of the world correctly only if 'the container does not leak' (Peña 2021, 774; see also Berg 2011). But already in 1990s, Wolfgang Welsch (among others) stressed that we have

learned to think in exclusionary terms and to widely understand the notion of culture as bordered ethnic(ised) or national(ised) – which clashed with the lived reality of ordinary people. The contemporary realities have made such leaks the norm rather than the exception – if it was ever the case, especially in border regions (Berg 2011; Misiejuk 2011; Billig 1995).

The lived reality of cultures 'leaking' across national borders exposed the inadequacy of viewing borders merely as fixed territorial limits. Consequently, the territoriality paradigm and its limitations prompted a significant conceptual shift in border studies as well, often referred to as the 'processual shift.' As Chiara Brambilla (2014) explains, this shift moved the focus from the border as a noun – a static line – to *bordering* as a verb – an active, social process. This transition has been catalysed by events that have demonstrated the fluidity of political boundaries. The integration of the European Union, for instance, offered an eloquent example of de-bordering, where internal EU borders were softened to facilitate the flow of people and goods, while external borders were simultaneously reinforced (Peña, 2021). This revealed that borders are not simply disappearing but are being redefined and relocated. The bordering perspective posits that borders are not pre-given entities but are continually enacted through socio-cultural and discursive practices. Epistemologically, the border becomes 'an active verb […] and a space of struggle where value rationality, meaning, symbols, and action shape our knowledge and spatial practices' (Peña 2021, 780). This perspective began to incorporate agency, recognising that borders are not only imposed from above by states, but are also negotiated, subverted, and transgressed by those who cross or live near them.

Furthermore, the epistemic and ontological turn in studying borders is evident also in a recent and critically engaged development in border studies, namely the concept of *borderscapes*. Borderscapes attempt to capture the immense complexity, fluidity, and multidimensionality of contemporary borders. It is a rejection of the idea of reality being a fixed border, but rather a conception of borders as something that is in a constant state of 'becoming'. Borderscapes as a concept 'brings the vitality of borders to our attention, revealing that the border is by no means a static line, but a mobile and relational space' (Brambilla 2014, 22). Borders are therefore not only set – or set once and for all – but also, and more importantly, lived.

This can be observed in the need for mechanisms to maintain the borders, which, in turn, is reflected in the everyday practices and narratives of the inhabitants of borderlands (Paasi 1999; Sedmak 2009; Prokkola 2009; Pušnik 2011; Zadel 2020). Borderlands demark an area of national periphery, yet, according to Anssi Paasi (1999), they are permeated with symbols of nationality that originate from the very heart of the nation.

However, a borderscape is also 'an area, shaped and reshaped by transnational flows, that goes beyond the modernist idea of clear-cut national territories' (dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015, 6). Borderscapes present a space where multiple narratives, experiences, and power dynamics intersect and clash. As Maruša Pušnik highlights, 'the ideological production of national identities is most easily observed at the margins of society or at fringes of dominant discourses, where they meet and collide with other dominant discourses' (Pušnik 2011, 12). Borderscapes thus make visible the hidden and silenced stories that are often erased by an almost omnipotent national ideology, as identities that differ from the pure national prototype are understood as 'impossible, immoral, or treasonous' (Verdery 1996; Pušnik 2011). Borderscapes give voices to the agencies of the borderlanders.

Nevertheless, if borderlands are areas of contact between at least two national discourses, which means they consequently also present themselves as a contact between two 'national' cultures,[3] they are areas of formation and consolidation of specific social identifications and belonging, of the lived experiences of borderland inhabitants with the 'nation' and with what 'lies beyond its border'. The border, reinforced by national ideology, becomes engrained in peoples' lives. Eeva Prokkola points out the importance of distinguishing between cultural borders and identity borders: national borders are not only a function of state policy, but 'they shape specific social relations and mythical narratives, due to which the border becomes a marker of identity' (Prokkola 2009, 22). As

3 The phrase 'national culture' is in quotation marks because following transculturation and borderscape theories, we do not live in a word with distinct and delineated 'national cultures' as would follow from the simplified and prevailing jigsaw puzzle world paradigm in which people predominately understand national cultures as distinct one from another. However, as Berg (2011) notes, 'not only in popular scientific discourses, people deal with "cultures" as if they are congruent with states/countries' (Berg 2011, 7).

I have pointed out elsewhere (Zadel 2020), it is important to distinguish between different aspects of identity. If Prokkola marks the distinction between identity and culture, I argue for a distinction between 'national' and 'cultural' identifications. In this sense, I consider culture, which is primarily understood within the frame of nationalism, e.i. a 'national culture' as contraposed to transcultural practices – and both presents as both important identity markers. Consequently, this would allow for an analytical distinction between national identification and cultural identification beyond national identification. People express both of them discursively and through their everyday cultural practices. The 'national' and the 'lived' 'cultural' are intrinsically related, sustaining one another, nevertheless, examined in accordance with the 'border-crossing' practices, they can represent different phenomena (see Zadel 2020).

Everyday Nationhood as an Analytical Framework for Researching Borderscapes

Resonating with the borderscape perspective – borders as 'lived' spaces and in a constant state of 'becoming' – studying nationalism in borderlands calls for a theoretical and methodological approach rooted in 'mundane' and the 'ordinary', since the macro-processes of globalization, bordering, and national ideology are ultimately grounded in the micro-practices of daily life. Borderlands are areas where macro-structures of the nation and the permeability of borders are mirrored in local contexts and the agency of individuals – the analysis of *bordering* must connect with the analysis of *belonging* and *identifications*. In order to systematically examine *how* people *belong* – to the nation, borderland, local community, how they enact, describe, embody, and even subvert the nation in their mundane routines – we turn to the framework of 'everyday nationhood' presented by Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008a). Their concept provides the framework for exploring discourses and practises with which individuals – whether in borderlands or in the heart of the nation – navigate, reproduce, or oppose the conception of the nation in their lives, presenting a methodological approach that makes the abstract nation a tangible part of our daily life.

As Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) point out, the main goal of nationalism is to make a nation, which in turn means to make people national. However,

people are 'made national' by different state and nation-making processes the states employ in order to convey a sense of nationhood among the general, non-elite populations and/or are a consequence of specific historic circumstances: capitalism, industrialisation and centralised nationalised school systems based on national 'high' culture (Gellner 2008; Schlesinger 1987), censuses (Verdery 1990; 1996; Bauman (2013), decline of sacred authority and print capitalism (Anderson 2003). Even though states have a lot of power at their disposal, nationalism and the quest to 'make people national', cannot be successful without the (active) role of 'ordinary people':[4] 'The nation [...] is not simply the product of macro-structural forces; it is simultaneously the practical accomplishment of ordinary people engaging in routine activities' (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a, 537). Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a, 537) follow Hobsbawm quest to analyse nationalism also from below to fully understand it: ordinary people must be included in the research on nationalism, as Hobsbawm puts it, as it is otherwise impossible to analyse the essence of national belonging and identifications and draw conclusions just from our assumptions (Hobsbawm 2007). In studying nationalism, we must acknowledge the mundane and everyday aspects of people's social lives: even though 'nationalism is "... constructed essentially from above, [it] ... cannot be understood unless also analysed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist."' (Hobsbawm in Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a, 537). Fox and Miller-Idriss propose that the nation is banally 'accomplished', to borrow Billig's (1995) expression, through different ways of incorporating and giving meaning to the nation in everyday life.

For the purpose of this article, we'll follow the definition of 'making people national' as a process of identification and belonging, as well as the consequences, which are shown in the people's belief in the global order of nation-states as natural phenomena, where, consequently, a part of our

4 Smith criticised the Fox and Miller Idriss's notion of 'everyday nationhood' also on the ground of "undifferentiated 'ordinary people'" (2008, 565). Acknowledging this shortage, they responded by stressing their modest goal of drawing the 'attention to the paucity of research in the field of nationalism on the non-elite side' (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008b, 575).

social lives is defined in national terms, i.e. having a national identity understood as a natural and essential phenomena by the individuals themselves. To put it differently, if people do not identify in national terms, or oppose them, they have not been made national.

Since nationalism operates at borders as well, people 'are made national' also in borderlands. But borderlands present specific social realities: people are supposed to have a national identity, but at the same time they are clashing with national (and cultural) identities across the national border (Pušnik 2011; Šumi 2000). Nationalism assumes nations are culturally homogeneous, as well as bounded and delineated, one could say, protected from external cultural influences by the national border. But how do people feel, understand and act on the fringes of the nation, clashing with the border, or the nations and their presumed delineated cultures beyond borders? This brings us to the research questions: How are the tensions between the idea of nations as 'containers' and the life at a porous border lived and explained by ordinary people? Does the border and the reality beyond the border become significant in peoples' lives – and if, how?

Making People National

Fox and Miller Idriss's (2008a) propose studying everyday nationhood through employing four perspectives; ordinary people bring the nation to life by 1.) talking the nation; 2.) choosing the nation; 3.) performing the nation; and 4.) consuming the nation. ***Talking the nation*** is directing the attention to 'talking about the nation', i.e. to what people say about the nation, the terms they use, what it means to them, etc. However, this presents a research-led inquiry. Then again, the second part, 'talking with the nation', focuses on the spontaneous conversations that occur on the topic of the nation (if at all) (ibid., 538–540), which is focused on occurrences without the researcher and are therefore difficult to capture in research.

Performing the nation encompasses the ritual performances of everyday life. It focuses on the commemorations, ceremonies, as well as sport events and similar performances. Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) argue that in these cases 'people are not just consumers of national meaning', but 'they are simultaneously their contingent producers' (ibid., 546).

Choosing the nation (making national choices and making choices national) centres the choices people make in regard to different options they have when our options are 'defined in national terms' (ibid., 542): from sending a child to a minority language school or kindergarten to marriage partners and friends. The examples listed may be dismissed as too mundane or as not actual choices or not contributing to a national belonging. As Fox and Miller Idriss explain, even though these choices are 'not necessarily national, can structure the trajectories of future choices in ways that reinforce nationhood as a salient idiom of belonging' (ibid.). Moreover, they emphasise that the 'nationally marked institutions' don't always 'make nationhood experimentally salient' (ibid., 543). Moreover, the act of choosing may be so engrained in our naturalised understanding of nationally-marked choices as, for example, choosing a male or female toilet – 'unreflective' and 'automatic' (ibid.). Nevertheless, it is a choice. And even more important is the fact of not reflecting on the choices means nationalism is successful in convincing us that it was not a choice, consequently naturalising a world of nations and national belongings.

Consuming the nation focuses on the choices people make – but as consumers. It stresses that people are not just uncritical consumers of the nation, but also 'creative producers' of the nation 'through everyday acts of consumption' (ibid., 550), which can also be linked to and reinforced by discursive acts. What does it mean to eat nationally marked food or watch nationally marked television content? Consuming the nation encompasses all products that are national or nationally consumed: media, school curricula, museums, food, music, etc. (ibid., 550–551). Food may be one of the aspects that builds an especially strong relationship with nationalism, which is even more compelling in contrast to curricula or museums, which are 'elite-curated', while food is ingrained in the very heart of everyday life – not to foster an essentialist framework, however, this is how people perceive and talk[5] about it (Ichijo, Johannes and Ranta 2019). Accordingly, food provides in our popular discourses the appeal to 'create

5 Fox and Miller Idriss presented four different modes of everyday nationhood function, which are analytical, but, of course, in everyday life they are interlinked and intermingle: we can talk about and argument on performing the nation, choosing national products or consuming it, for example.

cultural boundaries and distinctions, to differentiate through the creation of a culinary "self" and "other"' (ibid., 2) and thus provides 'a description of what is being considered as national' (ibid., 3).

Similarly, media consumption is widely understood as a leisure activity and consequently, in popular discourses, it is hardly linked to nationhood and nationalism. However, it is especially through such mundane practices that national sensitivities and belonging are imagined, re-created and negotiated. Media consumption and its use of content in everyday life thus becomes an important outlet in constructing national belonging (Anderson 2003; Billig 1995; Pušnik 2011; Ederson 2002; Skey 2011; Morley and Robins 2002; Gillespie 1995; Zadel 2020). Following Anderson's (2003) and Morley and Robins' (2002) insights, participating in a 'ritual', knowing that a lot of others – peers, co-nationals, etc. – are also participating in it, forms the basis for a shared experience (Morley and Robins 1995, 132), with the media providing shared content for the production of new shared meanings. Media, as well as other forms of consumption, form the basis for an imagined community (Anderson 2003; Vogrinec 2003). As Marie Gillespie stressed, (young) people talk about media content, which is an important recreational part of their interactions. A shared set of content, rituals, references, and meanings is important for building a sense of community, be it geographical, generational, ethnic/national, transcultural or other. In relation to national identifications, as Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) stress, consuming national artefact may have different meanings for people, but it can articulate or reinforce their nationhood, national pride and belonging, as well as ways in which they are expressed. Moreover, '[c]onsumption constitutes, reinforces and communicates social membership: it makes "visible and stable the categories of culture"' (Douglas and Isherwood 1996 in Fox and Miller Idriss 2008a, 550).

Even though Fox and Miller Idriss' methodological suggestion of everyday nationhood stresses examples of minority choices and consumption, the nation and culture as a lived experience of performance, choices, consumption and discourse are important features of people's everyday lives even in borderlands. Studying nationhood on the margins of society, i.e. at the national borders, may be interesting as, on the one hand, as Pušnik (2011, 12) stresses, the ideological production of national identities is easiest to

find on the 'fringes of dominant discourses, where they meet and clash with other dominant discourses', while on the other hand, it may reveal specific aspects of belonging and identifications, as identities that differ from the pure national prototype are understood as 'impossible, immoral, or treasonous' (Verdery 1996; Pušnik 2011). Since the nation is constantly (re)produced and negotiated through people's mundane practices, Fox and Miller Idriss (2008a) offer a framework for reimagining borders not as distant peripheries, but as concentrated sites of everyday national performance and the possible clashes with the 'impossible' transcultural practices. In the following parts, the research conducted in the borderland of Slovenian Istria will present the responses of its inhabitants in relation to their understanding and relationship to the Slovenianness and Italianness across the border.

Methodology

The case study presented below was conducted as part of PhD research (Zadel 2022), carried out in Slovenian Istria, a border area in Southwest Slovenia that is bordering two nation-states: Italy on the Northwest and Croatia on the South. The study focused on national identifications and media consumption, especially in relation to Italian and Slovenian media among the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria, employing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods.

First, a telephone survey was conducted in 2014 with a total of 715 respondents. The telephone survey used a stratified random sampling from the telephone directory, including people with a telephone number publicly available, which allowed for generalisations to the entire population of Slovenian Istria, and consequently the analysis of statistically significant correlations. It should be noted that this means the research included individuals from the dominant Slovenian population (85.4%), the 'autochthonous' Italian minority with special rights guaranteed by the Slovenian Constitution (1.4%) and other minorities, predominantly from the republics of the former Yugoslavia; Croatian (2.9%), Serbian (2.5%), Bosnian (1.1%), etc. The overall gender breakdown of the sample was as follows: 39.9% of male and 61.1% of female respondents. The age breakdown was: 7.3 % between the age of 15 and 25 years (first age group), 12.6 % between 26 and 36 years (second age group), 14.8% between 37 and 38 years (third

age group), 19.9% between 48 and 58 years (fourth age group) and 45.2% older than 58 years (fifth age group).

Secondly, participants in the telephone survey were asked if they also want to participate in the second part of the research, i.e. the interviews. From the people who were willing to participate, a selection was made according to age groups and gender, and according to the diverse Italian and Slovenian media consumption and national identification. The interviews partly used the life histories approach. They were conducted in 2015 with a total of 30 respondents (27 were collected by telephone survey, while three from the youngest groups were obtained otherwise). There were 18 female and 12 male interviewees. There were six interviewees in the first, second and third age group, five in the fourth age group, and seven in the fifth age group. The purpose of the life-stories type interviews was to gain a more complete and detailed insight into the portrayal of feelings and sensibilities, meaning-making, habits and motivations of the informants. The quotes from the interviews are thus especially useful for illustrating the discursive 'reasoning' as well as consumption and choices that constitute the everyday lives of inhabitants.

Consuming the National and Transborder Media in Slovenian Istria

The border becomes not just a physical infrastructure, but a discursive reality that is constantly 'talked into being' by those who live nearby. There are everyday discourses that may reinforce the salience of the border on the one hand and transcultural activities on the other. In Slovenian Istria, Mateja Sedmak (2009) noted that residents emphasised that their cultural practices were more similar to those of Italians across the border than to those of Slovenians from the central part of the country. On the other hand, Ana Kralj and Tanja Rener (2010) nevertheless stressed that inhabitants of Slovenian Istria see a marked distinction between Slovenians and Italians – 'mental' boundaries that could be understood in the context of 'insurmountable, fundamental differences', to use Barth's (1969) words, remain.

One of the insights of the case study reveals the dual phenomena, namely the prominent discursive and lived transculturality of Istria, alongside

the predominantly (mono)national self-identifications. The majority of respondents primarily identified as Slovenians, which was especially visible in the more elaborate responses in interviews. The connection to the state was mentioned in some cases:

I am Slovenian. Born in Slovenia and all. (Interviewee 6, f, 37 years)

Some also expressed their regional identification, but mainly in conjunction with emphasising that they are also proud Slovenians.

Well, I like to identify myself as a coming from the Litoral [laughing]. I don't know, I still think that we are very different from other Slovenians, which does not mean that I am not happy to be Slovenian. I am proud to be Slovenian. And I like my country and I'm happy to live here. […] I mean, there are bad and good qualities, but I like that we border Italy, that we're quite open, that... that we also have these Italian things. (Interviewee 18, f, 25 years)

While just a few, there were interviewees who stressed their transculturality and social construction of nationhood:

Hehe. I am Slovenian. A Contaminated Slovenian.

Contaminated with what?
With croationess and Italian[ess]... let's say contaminated by the neighbours. With much pleasure. Of course I can't deny my blood, DNA, but I do not give meaning to that … (Interviewee 8, f, 63 years)

The survey results reveal a strong recognition of Istria as a transcultural space. Using a five-point Likert scale, respondents assessed five statements on bordering and transcultural practices. A significant majority (73.9%) believe that proximity to the border has been shaping the local culture for centuries, and 62.8% agree that inhabitants have adopted specific characteristics from Italians. Notably, half of the respondents (strongly) agree that the lifestyle and mentality of Slovenians from Slovenian Istria align more closely with Italians than with Slovenians from mainland Slovenia. Despite this, nearly two-thirds (strongly) agree that attachment to the national milieu persists despite cross-border cultural flows.

Table 1: Transculturality in Slovenian Istria (responses in %)

	Living near the border has been changing the culture of the inhabitants for centuries	We are still tied to the Slovenian national milieu, even though we are watching (and following) the mass media from different cultural milieus	People living near the Italian border have some characteristics that they adopted from the Italians	Slovenian from Slovenian Istria are, according to their lifestyle and mentality, more similar to Italians than to Slovenians from main Slovenia	My childhood and youth would be very different without Italian TV programmes
Strongly disagree	3.5	1.8	4.9	8.4	26.8
Disagree	5.5	4.6	6.4	6.6	11.3
Neither agree nor disagree	15.8	26.7	26.0	31.3	17.5
Agree	31.3	33.2	35.8	30.4	19.1
Strongly agree	42.6	30.7	27.0	23.3	25.4
No answer	1.4	3.1	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

As illustrated by Fox and Miller Idriss's *Everyday Nationhood*, the salience of the nation, and, by extension, of the border is represented in different modalities, and consuming the nation through media is notable. Table 2 presents the survey results regarding media consumption among the inhabitants of the Slovenian Istria. The majority of respondents consume primarily Slovenian media (77,5% Newspaper, 50,5% Magazines, 79,9% Radio and 53,5% TV), but there is still a significant proportion of respondents who consume predominantly Italian media, especially Italian TV (14,6%) or equally frequent Slovenian and Italian TV (20,8%). The responses on respondents past consumption reveals the popularity of Italian media in the past. The consumption of television content is particularly notable, as consumption at the turn of the century was almost evenly divided between Slovenian and Italian television: 36,3% watched predominantly Slovenian television, 34,3% watched predominantly Italian television, and 23,6% watched both equally.

Table 2: Media consumption in Slovenian Istria (responses in %)

Type of media		Year	
		2014 (in %)	Appr. in 1999 (in %)
NEWSPAPERS	Slovenian	77,5	63,6
	Italian	1,6	3,2
	Equally frequent Slo&Ita	7,7	10,4
	Others	1,7	2,0
	I do not read newspapers	11,5	17,7
	No answer	0,0	3,0
MAGAZINES	Slovenian	50,5	55,8
	Italian	4,9	6,1
	Equally frequent Slo&Ita	6,0	12,0
	Others	3,0	2,4
	I do not read magazines	35,7	21,2
	No answer	0,0	2,5
RADIO	Slovenian	79,9	62,9
	Italian	3,4	7,1
	Equally frequent Slo&Ita	8,9	14,8
	Others	0,7	2,1
	I do not listen to radio	7,1	9,9
	No answer	0,0	3,2
TV	Slovenian	53,5	36,6
	Italian	14,6	34,3
	Equally frequent Slo&Ita	20,8	23,6
	Others	6,8	2,5
	I do not watch TV	3,6	1,1
	No answer	0,8	1,7

For a more detailed view, the respondents were asked to choose which television programme, film or series, one of Slovenian or Italian production, they would watch if they were broadcast at the same time.[6] Since unfamiliarity with both Slovenian and Italian programmes indicate a lack of interest in the genre, we excluded those who were unfamiliar with both programmes from the analysis. This leaves only those who chose either the first or the second

6 Since familiarity with the content significantly influences the choice, the answers 'I am not familiar with [the Slovenian production]' and 'I am not familiar with [the Italian production]' were also offered. The prerequisite for liking a programme is, first and foremost, familiarity with it (see Luthar 2012; Luthar and Kurdija 2011). Watching media content is an activity based on choosing what content to watch, but this is conditioned by emotional preferences – in other words, we choose what we like.

option, and those who are unfamiliar with only one of the options offered.

If the Slovenian and Italian programmes[7] included in the survey were broadcast at the same time, respondents would in most cases choose Slovenian programmes,[8] especially in the comedy series genre (*Naša mala klinika*: 76.8%), comedy sketch shows (*As ti tud not padu*: 76.4%), informative talk shows on current topics (Tarča: 75.8%) and talk and variety shows (*Na zdravje*: 71.3%). A larger proportion of respondents from Slovenian Istria would choose Italian programmes in the music competition shows (*Sanremo*: 55.8%) and hidden camera entertainment programmes (*Scherzi a parte*: 55%). Then again, in more than half of the cases, respondents would prefer to watch a Slovenian feature film, both older (*To so gadi*: 52.1%) and more contemporary (*V leru*: 50.9%).[9] Respondents were fairly evenly divided in their choice between the Slovenian and Italian reality shows *Big Brother*, with slightly more of them opting for the Italian *Grande Fratello* (48.2%) than the Slovenian version (45.2%).

Although most would prefer to watch a Slovenian programme, the fact that least one-fifth of respondents[10] would prefer to choose an Italian programme, film or series, is nevertheless quite telling. The Italian classic *Fanztozzi* was the first choice for almost half of the respondents, namely 45.2%. Almost half of the respondents, inhabitants of Slovenian Istria, are thus socialised in the same mediascape and feel familiar in the Italian popular culture. The choices, which were made out of convenience, as Italian programmes were dubbed while Slovenian subtitled, have more

7 The programmes in pairs were: 1.) *Big Brother* vs. *Grande fratello*, 2.) *Tarča* vs. *Porta a porta*, 3.) *Ema* vs. *Sanremo*, 4.) *To so gadi* vs. *Fantozzi*, 5.) *Skrita kamera* (s Francijem Kekom) vs. *Scherzi a parte*, 6. *Na zdravje* vs. *Uomini e donne*, 7.) *A si ti tud not padu* vs. *the Mai dire …* franchise, 8.) *V leru* vs. *Tre uomini e una gamba*, 9.) *Naša mala klinika* vs. *Casa Vianello*.

8 Corresponding to Morley and Robins' finding that if 'viewers [in Europe, author's note] have an alternative comparable entertainment offer in their own language, American programmes come second' (Morley and Robins 2002, 63).

9 The Italian programme is therefore the first choice more often for the minority of respondents, however, a lot of them have quite considerable percentage: *Fantozzi* (45.2 %), *Tre uomini e una gamba* (39.6 %), *Uomini e Donne di Maria de Filippi* (23.8 %) and *Porta a Porta* (20.5 %).

10 With the exception of the *Mai dire …* franchise, which is an age-specific genre and was chosen in 16.7 % of cases.

programmes and better quality as rated by the respondents,[11] influenced the socialisation process, the structure of feelings and imaginaries, impacted future experiences. One of the respondents explains that the Italian television content she watched as a child impacted her, giving her reference points with her peers in Istria:

> *We have this topic of conversation [cartoons that were broadcast on Italian channels, author's note], which can bring us together, and as I told you earlier, right, my future husband [current partner, author's note], and I, when we first met, we talked about these cartoons […], and that connects us. Because we have this common denominator in our childhood, you know.* (Interviewee 7, f, 33 years old)

Furthermore, even though the *Mai dire …* franchise was chosen only in 16.7% of cases, there is a statistically significant difference depending on the age of the respondents (sig.=0.001): among respondents who would rather watch the *Mai dire …* franchise, there are more people under 40 years of age (60.9%) than those over 40 years of age (39.1%), while among those who would choose *As ti tud not padu*, the ratio is reversed (41.1% aged up to 40 and 58.9% older than 40 would prefer to watch the Slovenian programme).

Thus, as already evident from Table 1, while the majority of respondents acknowledge the transcultural character of the region and perceive its inhabitants as more transcultural than their mainland co-nationals, they generally do not attribute a significant role to watching Italian television in childhood and adolescence. But, as further findings suggest, there was a significant difference between younger and older generations. The Italian TV programmes played a far more important (and statistically significant) role with the younger generations, as they were the ones who grew up with the Italian media contents, as in their childhood and youth, the Italian TV programmes became widely accessible and popular in Slovenian Istria. Many younger generations' informants thus stated they feel the

11 A good third (36.8%) believed that Slovenian TV programmes are worse than Italian ones, and only 16.7% believe that Slovenian programmes are better. They rate Slovenian programmes even worse in the past: 61% believe that 15 years ago they were worse than Italian programmes, and only 8.5 % believe that they were better (Zadel 2020, 2022).

Italian popular culture close to them, in some aspects even more so than Slovenian popular culture.

Similarly, Marie Gillespie (1995) argues that media content becomes part of the everyday lives of media consumers, and that television thus enabled a shared cultural experience (ibid., 58). Moreover, talking about media content, at the time of the research it was primarily television, is marked by a special form of pleasure; in addition to the pleasure of exchanging opinions with friends and others (ibid., 144), this could also include the pleasure of creating and maintaining (imaginary) communities and social networks. As Gillespie writes: 'Television discourse, although often understood as esoteric and trivial, is an important form of self-narrative and an extraordinary collective resource through which we negotiate identities' (ibid., 205). This was mirrored in some interviews:

> *Those legendary Italian films, like Fantozzi. […] Bud Spencer, we all watched anyway and we used those jokes among our peers […] Even now, we joke about Bad Spencer … with colleagues who are our peers. Or even Fantozzi, for example, these jokes remain, let's say from childhood, from youth, right.* (Interviewee 23, m, 33 years old)

As mentioned by younger informants, through 'recycling' or 're-creative consumption,' to borrow Gillespie's (1995) term, the content from Italian TV programmes has become part of their everyday life, 'slang' of individual groups of friends. As a 25-year-old interviewee says, this will probably stay with them for life:

> *I mean, my friends who watched it, every time we see each other, 'Ci sei, ce la fai?'*[12] *I mean, those are memories that will stay with me for the rest of my life. Zelig… and Mai [dire]…* (Interviewee 18, 25 years old)

In the everyday practices of informants, we also observe the intersection of cultural elements and content and the ways in which these have marked their experiences. Content from Italian media enabled some (especially

12 Literal translation: 'Are you there? Can you make it?', but the meaning corresponds to 'Do you understand?' This is from a famous sketch by Pino Campagna on the Italian comedy TV show *Zelig*, where he refers to interacting with his daughter and her slang.

younger) informants to form an 'imagined community,' to borrow Anderson's (2003) term, or 'interpretive communities,' to use Stanley Fish's (2012) term: following the Italian media, which was so widespread in a certain historical period, was a ritual in which individuals participated, knowing that most of their peers were also participating, which became the basis of a shared experience (Morley and Robins 1995, 132), with the media providing shared content for the creation of new shared meanings. As Marie Gillespie (1995) has also noted, young people – and probably others as well – talk about media content, which is an important recreational part of their interactions. Thus, popular culture, which manifests itself in everyday practices, represents the feelings of individuals and a part of their belonging. The border and the media beyond it played an important role in people's everyday belonging in Slovenian Istria. A belonging marked by the Italian border, which at the same time constructed an internal, invisible border within the nation: marking Istrians as 'insurmountably different' (Barth 1998; Welsch 1999, 2001; Šumi 2000) from the rest of Slovenians.

If the Italian TV content was rated as being of better quality than Slovenian content, especially in the past, as supported by the survey and the interviewees alike, there was a visible generational divide: the main audience was the generation younger than 40 years old, with some exceptions. This is also due to the fact that the range of children's and other programmes was more diverse, and films and series were (better) dubbed and not subtitled, as informants state. However, dubbing was still not the only advantage. the informants also point out the stylistic differences in television production and show hosting, which they found (and still find) more appealing than on Slovenian TV stations, pointing to a feeling of humorous and characterial proximity with the mediascape content from across the border.

We absolutely gave priority to the Italian media. Why? Because they were more dynamic, more, I would say, modern. (Interviewee 8, f, 63 years old)

What was interesting to you about this Italian manner?

I mean, let's say, this easygoingness that I still feel, unlike the Slovenian TV program, right. We [Slovenians, author's note] are very static. We are very similar to the Germans, right. Here we sit nicely, politely … while Italian television is,

I don't know, they are spontaneous, just the way they are. There is no, there is no rigidity, not in that program. […] this is probably the temperament and characteristic of the Italian viewer. Or: Italians are probably different from Slovenians, right. In other words, let's say that the people from Litoral [including Istria, author's note] are a little more different than central Slovenia, right. So, this matter is very close to us and Italian television. Also, the manner. (Interviewee 9, f, 48 years old)

It's really hard to generalise like that because of course we're a little more open here, right, compared to the rest of Slovenia, and that brings us a little closer to the Italians, no. […] So, I don't know, for sure there is an influence [from Italy author's note]. (Interviewee 2, m, 30 years old)

Illustrations from interviews on the cases of Italian and Slovenian media consumption show that the border is not merely a static line dividing two nation-states. It is a lived reality, which is better thought of as a strip of land along the border, an area of transborder cultural (co-)influence. The border presents a line between two nations, de-marking state sovereignty, but this does not mean that the border separates cultures as a lived way of life – no matter how hard we try to differentiate between 'national cultures'. The border, and what lies beyond it, becomes part of the lives of borderlands' inhabitants. It becomes ingrained in peoples' imaginaries, sensitivities, forming a structure of feeling, to borrow Williams's (1997) term. Slovenian Istria is thus congruent with borderscapes aspects as the dominant national discourses collide with people's transborder encounters, producing specific narrations, interpretations, and cultural negotiations related to the border and the lived social life in its vicinity (Brambilla 2014, 28; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015, 7–8; Krichker 2019, 1226, 1233). The cases presented align with the complexity and fluidity (Brambilla 2014; dell'Agnese and Amilhat Szary 2015), questioning the 'traditional', binary system of the jigsaw puzzle world (Peña 2021). Nevertheless, we can agree with Billig (1995): the national framework indeed still matters. the national identity is 'far from being a thing of the past' but rather a 'persistent and adaptable construction' that coexists with supranational bodies like the European Union, and despite the globalisation processes (Jurič Pahor 2003, 10). Kraidy (2005, 43) warns us that discourses of hybridity,

by assuming a weak nation-state, inadvertently serve the interests of economic globalization.

The border is indeed reinforced by national ideology, as 'mental borders' (Kralj and Rener 2010) between Slovenians and Italians remain. This can be observed in the self-identification of the Instrians. Namely, the inhabitants of Slovenian Istria did not define themselves as Italians, but (mostly) as Slovenians and Istrians. The television consumption also predominantly shows Slovenian choices. However, at the same time, the practices of the inhabitants in their everyday (media) consumption enact the nation in specific narrations, negotiations as well as subversions of the puristic national prototype. They recognise the influence of the border on a way of life that is similar to the one across the border, mirrored to a significant extend also in media consumption. The participants' responses show a processual character – historical, generational, and influenced by globalising processes – of what constitutes living in a borderland, countering discourses of monocultural national belonging. The inhabitants thus challenge the understanding of nations as containers. Indeed, the inhabitants primarily see borders as porous, resulting in the inhabitants' views of their similarity to the Italians, who are across the border, rather than Slovenian living within the premisses of the same country. The reality from across the border becomes engrained in people's relations – which for some remains even decades after childhood and youth. For some, media content has become a meaningful idiom of reality for their everyday experiences, interpreting and imagining their lives. The border and national belonging in the borderland can thus challenge the naturalised equation 'national territory = national culture'.

Instead of a Conclusion

The article presented the application of Fox and Miller Idriss's (2008a) methodological framework to borderland inhabitants, their narrations, representations, interpretations and cultural negotiations, emphasising inhabitants' agency in constructing the meaning of the nation and the border(land), thus employing also a borderscapes lens. However, the article presented only one aspect of Fox and Miller Idriss's (ibid.) everyday nationhood, namely media consumption, from a specific historical period.

Slovenian Istria (and other borderlands) could also be analysed from other everyday national aspects: from other consumptions to the choosing, performing and talking the nation as well. It is also important to include a more contemporaneous local and global perspective, going beyond (just) the Italian border. In contemporary intensified global processes, the consumption of commercial (social) media has gained prominence – which has been observed for several decades and the (un)popularity of Italian media among Istrians. Moreover, the Italian border is not the only border, as Istria is delineated also by Croatian border. Including different external national borders, their socio-historic meaning among inhabitants, as well as 'inner borders' contracted through time, would bring interesting complexities to the analysis of everyday nationhood at the borderland of Slovenian Istria. The inclusion of these different aspects would bring additional important findings regarding the ways in which the concepts of the nation and border become meaningful idioms in people's lives.

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