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**THE BRIONI ARCHIPELAGO:  
FUNCTIONAL IDENTITY OF A HISTORICAL LANDSCAPE**

Introduction

Brioni (Brijuni in Croatian) is a small archipelago of 14 islands and islets in the northern Adriatic, along the western coast of Istria, outside of the city of Pula in Croatia. The entire archipelago has been a national park since 1983. The two largest islands, Veli Brijun and Mali Brijun, are the most «valuable landscapes» for their cultural-historical and natural values, but also for the recreational and aesthetic values.

There is also a particular spacial quality of Brioni's location between the eastern and western coast of the Adriatic, as well as on the Mediterranean edge of the sub-Alpine region. The network of these geographical relations shaped the Brioni landscape and seascape as a socio-cultural space throughout history.

The Brioni islands can be described as a combination of two Braudelian categories of Mediterranean landscapes (as Paul Claval summarized them at the 21st PECSRL conference in 2004): low marshy plain and islands – both of these categories historically had periods of prosperity and periods of decadence and isolation (Paul Claval 2007, p. 28-29).

Historically, the largest two islands have been rural landscapes with primarily agricultural character, except during the last 100 years.

In assessing Brioni as a cultural landscape, we should follow Jelier Vervloet's "Atlantis" model of cultural stratification – multi-layered landscape. In his words "Atlantis refers to the situation in which a lot of elements of different periods are still visible at the surface in their original spacial distribution." (Vervloet 2007, 435)

The publication of the papers presented at the 21st PECSRL conference in 2004 (Roca *et al.* 2007) inspired us to examine the Brioni story in the context of this year's themes of historical landscapes and identity. The story is one of shaping and reshaping of this landscape and seascape, as the relations between nature and society changed in cycles around the permanent axis of its geography.

Which of these cycles – if not all of them - can provide an identity that may function in the present context of the national park? We don't have a definite answer, but will attempt to suggest some possibilities.

A brief overview of Brioni's long-term history and landscape transformations

1. The time depth of this landscape goes very deep. Literally, the first footprint was imprinted in the Mesozoic Era. A theropod or two lived here.
2. The first evidence of human impact dates to the middle Neolithic, c. 4000 BC, when we would expect that the practice of agriculture, and probably salt collection introduced the first significant modification of the landscape. Traces of huts were found beside the salt marsh in the bay of Saline. Nothing permanent is left in the landscape; only a handful of stone tools and fragments of pottery, now in the museumscape in Pula.

3. The 5000-year history of cultural landscape begins with the Bronze age and Iron Age – 13th – 2nd century BC. The first permanent markers still visible in the landscape were stone-built hill-forts of the Bronze and Iron Age inhabitants, known as Histrioi or Histri in the Greek and Roman sources - and only because they were pirates and difficult opponents . The peninsular region still bears the name Istria-Istra. These settlements have not been researched archaeologically, but there are many known parallels from the coastal territories.
4. The first historical transformation – when events are known from texts – began with the Roman expansion in the early 2nd century BC . Cultural and environmental consequences of the Roman conquest and settlement were profound and the changes were long lasting. For the first time there was no clear division between natural and cultural landscape in the archaeological record, so much was the natural landscape conditioned by human actions. Material culture dominated natural landscape. We may also see this change as the first modern transformation – in regard to the role that economy, lifestyle and mentality had in the forming of the landscape. Cash crops (olives and grapes) and intensive exploitation of natural resources (stone and salt) created wealth, which was used for extensive building in stone. The economic and social power permitted and demanded luxury lifestyle and leisure. In this landscape of production and leisure, a Roman senatorial family built one of the most luxurious maritime villas in the Roman world in Verige bay on the largest island.
5. The established economic and political power structure continued through the Late Roman, Byzantine and early medieval periods, but lifestyle and mentalities changed with Christianity and militarization. New spirituality, insecurity, and the need for defense and fortifications added a new layer of material culture in landscape. Brioni also became a significant seascape marker of navigational routes.

6. The Venetian rule, begun in 1331, continued the course and only built updated defences. The period of decadence and isolation, and malaria, set in with the 16th century and lasted for three centuries. Marshy areas on the south side of the island caused population transfer to the north-eastern side, facing the Istrian coast. Spiritual sites were also moved to that area. Coastal network, rather than the trans-Adriatic navigation became more important.
7. The Austrian rule in the 19th c. brought back the strategic role of Brioni. Between mid and late 19th c. there were 2 forts on Mali Brijun and 5 on Veli Brijun, one of them was one of the biggest forts in the Mediterranean. The Austrian forts were built on hill tops, like those in the Bronze and Iron Age.
8. The last major transformation of the Brioni landscape –and still lasting to the present day - began in 1893, when an Austrian steel magnate, Paul Kupelwieser, bought the concession to develop the islands as an elite tourist resort. The general European enthusiasm for the Mediterranean, ancient/classical Mediterranean in particular, governed him in his projects. Brioni was an ideal Mediterranean leisure landscape, almost in the heartland of Austria. Leisure had to be coupled with usefulness and esthetic appeal of the land, like in Roman times. Kupelweiser got rid of malarial marshes, renewed the old vineyards and olive groves and created an English landscape park. An Istrian forester composed the landscape with parks, forests and meadows. And even implanted tropical plants and animals. Building of elite villas and hotels followed. Ancient ruins of Roman villas and small temples, explored by Anton Gnirs, an Austrian archaeologist, completed the Mediterranean character of a mythological landscape. This period lasts until the WW I. Then, the landscape of leisure and luxury was once again, like in late Roman times, adapted to warfare efforts. The old Austrian forts received soldiers again and the hotels and villas accommodated officers

and navy commanders. At the end of the war Austria lost and Italy gained Brioni.

Elite tourism resumed, more villas were built, and tennis courts and a golf course were added. Italian archaeologists carried on research.

9. In the post-WW II settlement, Brioni went to Yugoslavia. The islands became a safe location and an ideal setting for a presidential retreat and a state residence. As the Roman senator did, the Yugoslav president Tito created his landscape of power and production with a secluded residence, stately villas, and with vineyards and tangerine groves. New tropical animals and plants were brought in, many as presidential gifts. Even an archaeological site - the Byzantine castellum - was completely excavated next to the presidential residence. This political landscape was not a new phenomenon, but the radical demographic change was the first in history. All the remaining inhabitants were removed from the islands to the coastal town of Fažana. This change is still in force to this day and there are no permanent residents on the islands. Such a demographic collapse could have occurred 2000 years earlier as the consequence of the Roman conquest, but we lack archaeological evidence for it.
10. After Tito's death in 1980 the political character of the Brioni's cultural and natural landscape, then imbued with the memory of the charismatic leader, needed a new, public identity. The solution was a National Park, created in 1983. The largest island opened to ordinary and elite tourism. It became a popular destination of daily tourist excursions and an occasional venue for state or scientific conferences. However, it also remained an exclusive summer resort of government officials and a high-end vacation place with the stay in old villas and two luxury hotels. The Croatian independence brought no change, only the legal protection from any development under the jurisdiction of four state ministries, because of Brioni's competing significance for natural and cultural heritage, tourism and state affairs. Recently, a part

of the historical landscape became an open-air theater- literary. Theatrical performances are held in the 19th c. Austrian fort on Mali Brijun. This seasonal tourist attraction parallels summer performances in two World Heritage sites in Croatia: Diocletian's palace in Split and in the old city of Dubrovnik.

## Functional identity

Assessment of historical/cultural landscapes should be the first step in defining both function and identity. Vervloet has recognized that the cultural landscape is a complex and changing reality. Considering the special complexity in assessing an Atlantis model of cultural landscape, he asked "what could be the leading philosophy in this case : the age of the different relics, their variety, or the story these collections of material are telling us about the shaping and reshaping of a landscape?" (Vervloet 2007, 435)

He seems to favor the third option and we find it convincing and applicable to Brioni.

In the biography of Brioni's landscape three key functions, which are also closely related to its identity, dominate throughout history. 1) productive, 2) defensive/security and 3) leisure and entertainment. In some periods - notably the Roman period – we find the combination of two or all three of them and see those functions interdependent. The exception are the last 100 years when the third function predominates, although for the president Tito security was also a concern. The productivity function has been completely neglected in recent times, which is not surprising in view of the general post-productivity phase in the Mediterranean, especially on the islands. Brioni is entirely a place of consumption today.

If we do not want to make a museum of Brioni's landscape how do we then find a functional identity for it in the context of the national park?

National park implies primarily natural landscape, but the nature on Brioni has been fundamentally and consistently conditioned by human actions. Brioni's landscape is almost entirely historical-cultural.

How do we integrate natural and cultural themes and offer the public an understanding of Brioni's story of the changing relations between nature and society?

The Brioni islands are today presented to the public as a recreational landscape consisting of a collection of disconnected, individual monuments and natural attractions. It is not at all clear how and why the individual monuments are part of spatial/historical framework. Tourists cherish the aesthetic value of the «nature», but do not understand the dynamics of landscape change.

The current functional identity of Brioni as the recreational, leisure landscape preserves the idea of the elitist landscapes of the past. The 20th century form of such a landscape is entirely preserved and currently in use. We may suggest that a thematic presentation of the historical landscape in relation to the three functional identities we identified before may be a good solution. We see such an approach as best at capturing and reconstructing historical mentalities and lifestyles and explaining how those shaped Brioni's landscape and seascape.