

## TRANSFORMATION OF TRADITIONAL CULTURAL LANDSCAPES - Koper 2019

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# Canal of St. Bartholomew in Seča/Sezza: Social construction of the seascape

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**Abstract:** This article is based on a combination of anthropological and geographic approaches to seascape as an aspect of the cultural landscape. Following McCall Howard, Wickham-Jones, Ingold, and Arnason, we understand the term seascape as a “holistic term to describe the depth and complexity of human relations with the sea, the modes of human habitation of the sea, the importance of the sea to maintaining livelihoods, and the connections between land and sea.” We analyze the cartographic materials chronologically from the Franziscan Cadaster to present day and determine how the use of the Canal of St. Bartholomew has changed through time. Once a part of saltpans, providing salt water for salt production and a transport route, it is now a scenic place for leisure and a protected area. As a part of the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, the canal was poorly managed and is now a liminal site of nonregulated berths for pleasure vessels. For these reasons, this contested seascape is represented as “Texas,” an ecological disgrace, and a boat cemetery. This area is used for many contested activities, which at the same time contribute to environmental vulnerabilities and the destruction of natural and cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Canal of St. Bartholomew, seascape, contestation, liminality, geography, anthropology, land use

## 1 Introduction

The cleaning of the Canal of St. Bartholomew in Seča/Sezza started in mid-January 2019 on the initiative of the Water and Investments Directorate and the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning. According to the news, it was the first time after 28 years of warnings about the situation in the canal (such as poor management of the canal and the failure to arrange proper bicycle lanes) that representatives of the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial planning and the Water and Investments Directorate finally visited the inhabitants of the contested area in the company of Piran’s mayor. The central Slovene daily *Dnevnik* published an article titled: “Cleaning the Canal of St. Bartholomew: 15 min for 15 years of shame” [1]. A representative of the local community explained to the reporter that there were several vessels in the area that did not belong to the inhabitants of Seča. On the day of reporting, there were 224 boats, but the number varied significantly because new provisory piers and berths were constructed and boats were continuously brought in without any regulation and payments. It was stated that the free berths were recognized across the borders of locality and that there was even one Czech boat moored there in the summer of 2018. “This place is not only a boat cemetery, it is also a wild camp-site” [1]. Many boats sunk and the locals removed them, because vessels were abandoned and started to fall apart. The journalist reported that the situation after 1991 was severe. According to the local inhabitants, there was lacking surveillance of the vessels in the Canal of St. Bartholomew, the area needed bicycle lanes, and the houses above the canal did not have a proper sewage system. One interlocutor was content with the minister’s visit to the area and his personal engagement in solving the situation. The article explained that the company workers of VGP Drava Ptuj d.o.o. from Styria (northeastern Slovenia) and divers started to remove parts of broken boats from the water. Shipwrecks were then transported to Austria because Slovenia does not have a landfill that could be used in compliance with environmental

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rules. On that occasion, the mayor of the Municipality of Piran, where the local community of Seča belongs, said as follows: “This is a historic event, we have been too passive for many years, we will arrange berths, maintain them, and in no way allow anything like this to happen again” [1]. The mayor went on to explain that the future of the Canal of St. Bartholomew remained unclear. According to him, the Municipality of Piran, the local community of Seča, and the state brought forth different visions about the usage and the management of the place. Would it serve as a marina or a communal berth for the local inhabitants? Would it be cleared and converted into a park with ancient boats representing cultural heritage without any berths for pleasure vessels? Similarly, it was not clear who would take care of water management: the state or the municipality. At the same time, the mayor promised that every decision would be made in agreement with the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning.

Starting from this episode, we understand the Canal of St. Bartholomew as a cultural landscape with several different usages of the area, which triggered a series of disputes over the last quarter of the century. The theoretical ground of this article is based on the geographical and anthropological understanding of the area as a cultural landscape, the elements of the landscape that are created by man [2]. As some other authors, we understand landscapes as the term for physical environment that is shaped or transformed by human action, and we are interested in material and immaterial elements, visible and invisible elements of human activities that make up the material culture and symbolic parts of the environment [3]. We follow the conceptualization, according to which readings of cultural landscape “are suggestive windows onto various contours of societies, cultures, histories and politics of the countries and regions that they border on” [4,5].

Our site of research may be described as a seascape because the Canal of St. Bartholomew provides salty water to the saltpans and it is also used as a navigating canal and a nonformal port. We understand seascape as a holistic term [6], with which we “describe the depth and complexity of human relations with the sea, the modes of human habitation of the sea, the importance of the sea to maintaining livelihoods, and the connections between land and sea” [6].

## 2 Methods

The cartographic analysis and the comparison comprise the analytical description of aerial photography between

1954 and today, the Franziscan Cadaster from 1827, and other early cartographic materials. The anthropological part is based on the previous research on ethnography of walking. Walking is regarded not only as an aspect of physical mobility but also as special practices that trigger symbolic meanings connected with place, such as memories, associations, and movement through imaginaries and representations. We understand walking as an aspect of ethnography of mobility and mobile ethnography [5]. The anthropological fieldwork combines participant observation, informal interviews, as well as analysis of visual images and the discourses of several actors published in virtual space and on social media, which give us a reflection of contemporary and historical constructions of the Canal of St. Bartholomew as a particular seascape.

### 2.1 The development of the Canal of St. Bartholomew and its surroundings through time

The Canal of St. Bartholomew lies in the southwestern part of Slovenia, in the settlement of Seča named after the homonymous peninsula. It is located in the multicultural area represented as a world where “Slavic and Italian cultures and languages meet” and where bilingualism is officially recognized. For this reason, the Canal of St. Bartholomew has – beside its official Italian name “Canale di San Bartolomeo” and local colloquial Italian name “Canale di San Bortolo” – also several Slovene variants of denominations: “Kanal Sv. Jerneja,” “Jernejev kanal,” and “Kanal Jernej.” The mouth of the canal is situated in the northeastern corner of the Adriatic Sea and is called the Bay of Piran, where the national border runs between Croatia and Slovenia.

At the same time, the Canal of St. Bartholomew lies on the margin of the Sečovlje saltpans, which have been formed in the shallow sea basin filled with sediments brought by the Dragonja River, between the peninsulas Seča in the north and Savudrija in the south. More precisely, the Canal of St. Bartholomew delimits the Sečovlje saltpans from the surrounding low hills on the northern side. Its function was to supply sea water to the saltpans. According to some sources, the canal is only fed water from the sea, as there are no tributary flows from inland [7]. Paradoxically, according to some other sources, this water flow is also not seldomly called “Jernejski potok” or in English “Bartholomew’s creek” [8], giving the

impression that the canal also carried fresh water. The canal is approximately 3.9 km long and not wider than 40 m, excluding at the mouth. The sea bottom is muddy, and the depth is between 0.5 and 2 m in some parts of the mouth [9].

The area was already settled in the Roman Period. In and near the mouth of the Canal of St. Bartholomew, the remnants of a Roman villa (*villa marittima*) were found with the remains of a Roman port – the pier, which is now submerged [10,11]. The first written mention of the Sečovlje saltpans dates to 804 [12]. Throughout the history, the only buildings present near the Canal of St. Bartholomew were various salt warehouses. During the *Serenissima* period, five wooden salt warehouses were built at the mouth of the canal, from where salt was shipped to Venice [13]. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, three wooden salt warehouses were present in the Seča area (near the mouth and near the settlement of Sv. Jernej/San Bortolo) [14–16]. In the first half of the nineteenth century, the Austro-Hungarians built several new salt warehouses [17]. All the aforementioned warehouses have been demolished.

Our study area actually does not cover the entire Canal of St. Bartholomew, but only the second half, an about 2 km

long stretch between the settlement of Sv. Jernej and the mouth of the canal. Figure 1 shows the study area and the local toponyms for various areas and the location of Seča within Slovenia. The zone around the mouth of the Canal of St. Bartholomew is locally called Ribič (Fisherman). In the middle of the canal, near the other extremity of our study area, is the small settlement of Sv. Jernej. Right beside it, toward the mouth, the factory Začimba (Spice) was constructed, lending its name to the entire nearby area.

Figure 2 shows the Canal of St. Bartholomew at the time of the Franziscan Cadaster (1827), which was the first cadastral map for this area. We can also see that the saltpans were very active, and in the Ribič zone, there was one salt warehouse (Ro. Magazeno, meaning Reggio Magazeno or state warehouse). There were only a few houses along the canal.

Figure 3 shows the Canal of St. Bartholomew in 1954. The saltpans still seemed active, and the zone where the Začimba factory would be later constructed was occupied by a big sports camp, and there are some small piers in the Canal of St. Bartholomew and very few buildings in its vicinity. When compared with 1827 (Figure 2), more houses were present, especially in the Začimba zone. Figure 4 shows the year in which buildings that are now present

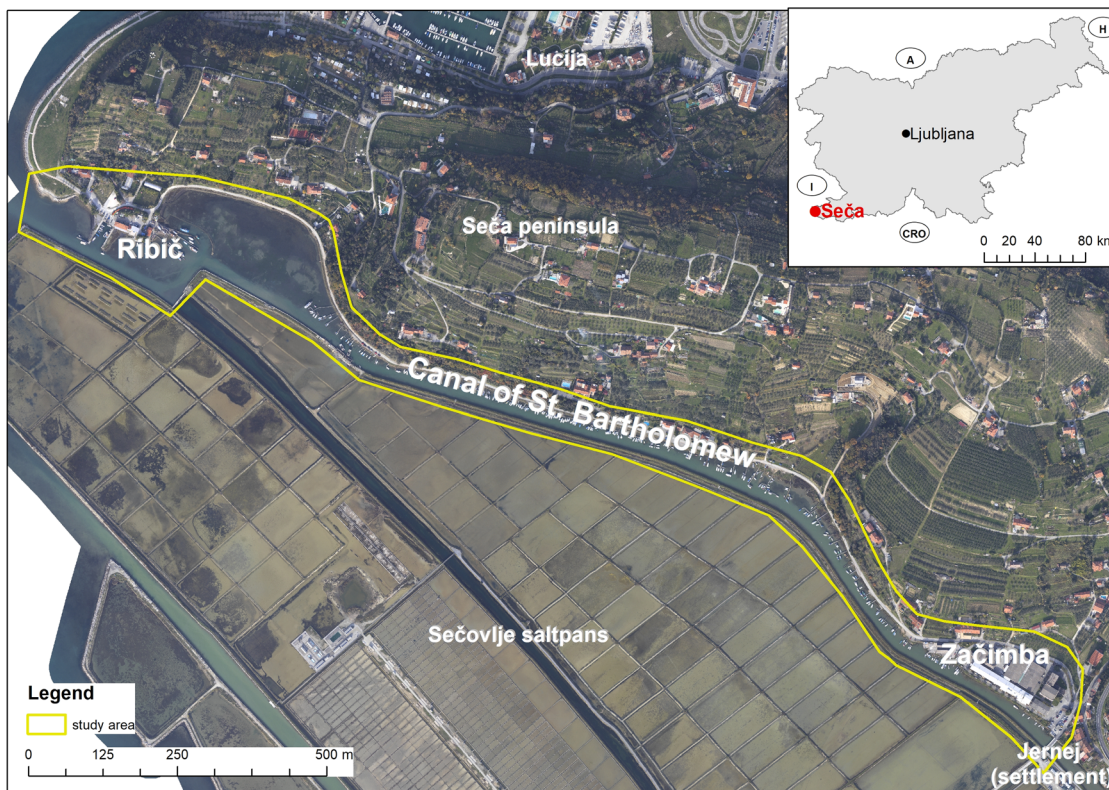


Figure 1: Location of the Canal of St. Bartholomew [18,19].



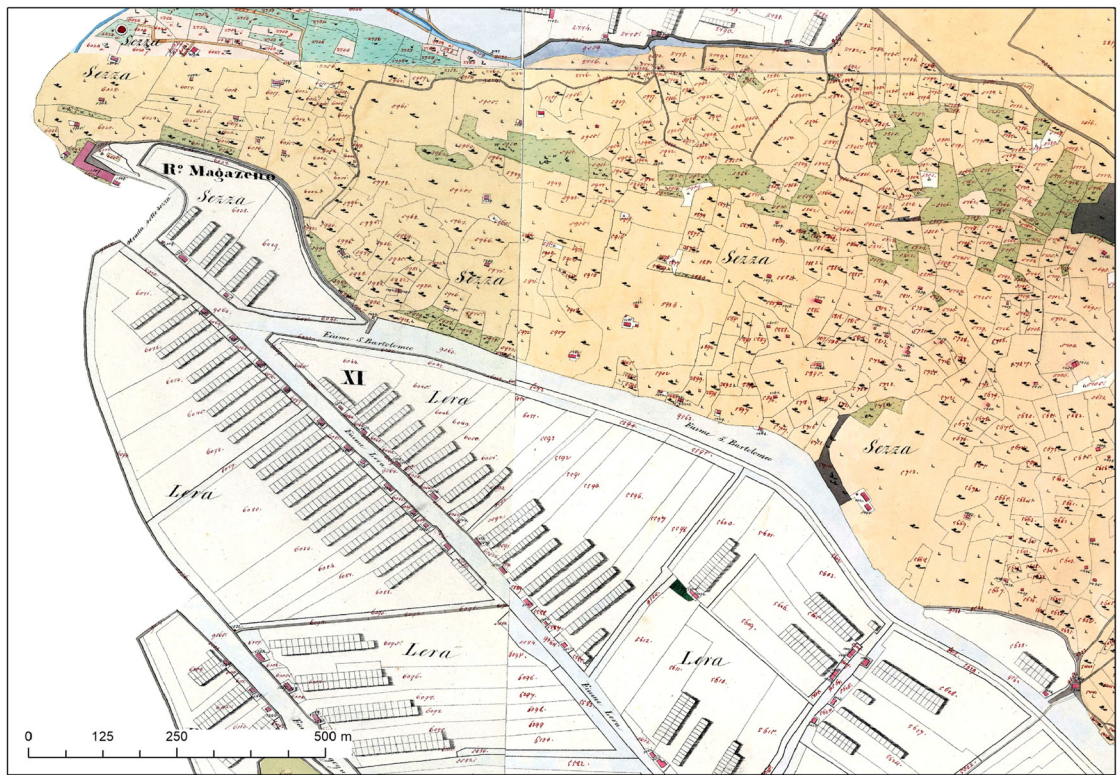
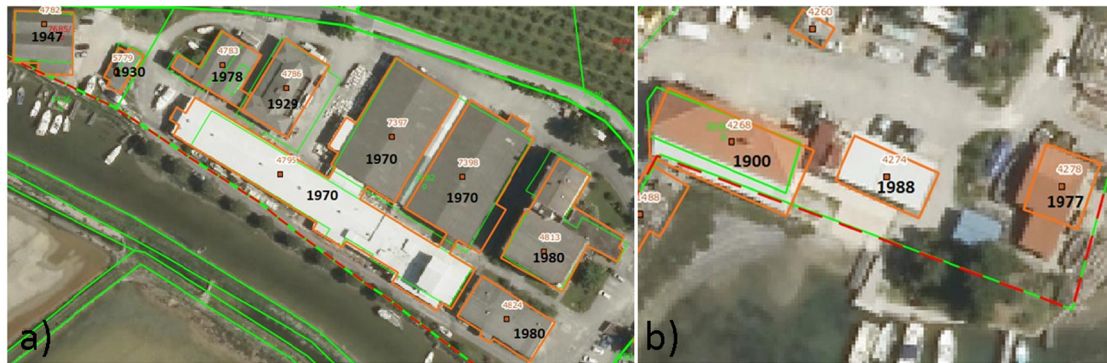


Figure 2: Canal of St. Bartholomew in the Franziscean Cadaster [20].



Figure 3: Canal of St. Bartholomew in an aerial photograph from 1954 [21].





**Figure 4:** Construction chronology of buildings along the canal, (a) the Začimba zone and (b) the Ribič zone [22].

in the Ribič and Začimba zones were constructed. The construction started in 1900 in the Ribič zone, and the first house in the Začimba zone, the so-called Doppolavoro di Siccirole building, was built in 1929. This brick building with stone frames was a kind of cultural home for saltpans workers. One year later, in 1930, a house for a transformer station was built, and in 1947, the “boathouse” building was constructed.

All three aforementioned houses in the Začimba zone are shown in Figure 5 representing an old postcard dating to before the Second World War.

In 1954, the Začimba factory producing spices launched its operations in the former Doppolavoro building. Initially, only it produced spices. In 1964, the Začimba factory merged with two other food producing companies and changed its name to Droga Portorož [24].

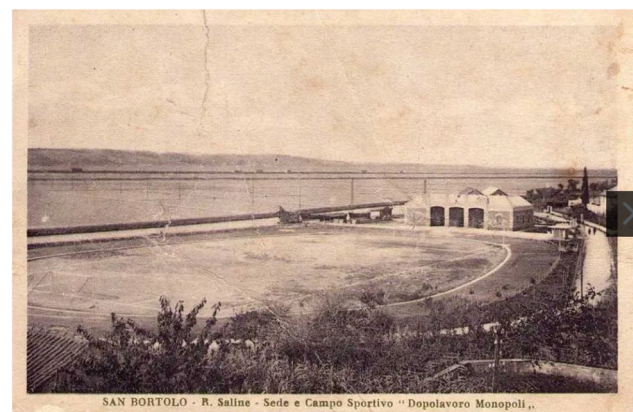
The following aerial photograph is from 1971 [25]. Unfortunately, it does not cover the entire area; the Začimba zone is missing. Figure 4 shows that the major factory buildings were constructed in the 1970s and the last two in 1980. If we take a look at the canal of St. Bartholomew, we can see a few small piers but almost no boats in it.

The situation had radically changed by 1997 (Figure 6). The Začimba zone was filled with factory buildings, as shown in Figure 4. In the Ribič zone, a small shipyard for repairing traditional wooden ships was built in 1973. According to [13], some repairing facilities and a salt port were already present there during the Serenissima. It should be added that this period also witnessed an increasing number of (private) houses in proximity of the Canal of St. Bartholomew. The biggest change that can be observed in this photograph is that in the Canal of St. Bartholomew, there are many small piers and boats, which means that the trend of constructing illegal berths here started somewhere between 1971 and 1997, or in the 1980s according to one interlocutor.

Figure 7 shows the Canal of St. Bartholomew in 2003. In 2001, the food producing factory Droga moved out from the Začimba factory complex and was sold to a private owner. Compared with the situation in 1997, the number of piers and boats (illegal berths) augmented.

Figure 8 shows the photograph from 2017. Although it may be said that at least from the beginning of the new millennium the problem of illegal berths in the Canal of St. Bartholomew was very real and acute, the photograph shows that their number increased significantly until 2017. Also notable was the increase in the number of new houses built near the canal. This observation becomes even more alarming, considering that in 1990, the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park was established, meaning that apart from the entire saltpans, the Canal of St. Bartholomew is a protected area as well [28]. In 1992, the Sečovlje saltpans were included in the list of Wetlands of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention [28].

In 2004, the Government of Slovenia ratified the NATURA 2000 sites with the Decree on Special Areas of Conservation (Natura 2000 sites), and the Decree on



**Figure 5:** Photograph of the Doppolavoro, the boathouse and the transformer station from the 1930s [23].



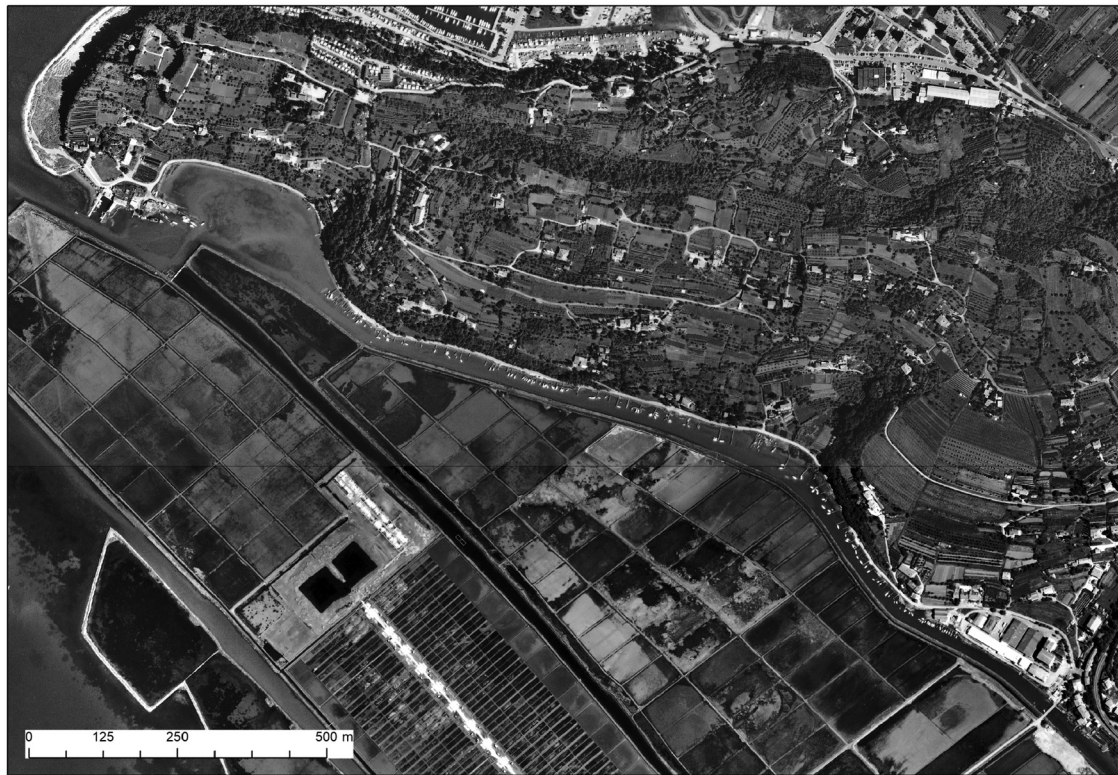


Figure 6: Canal of St. Bartholomew in an aerial photograph from 1997 [26].



Figure 7: Canal of St. Bartholomew in an aerial photograph from 2003 [27].





**Figure 8:** Canal of St. Bartholomew in an aerial photograph from 2017 [18].

Amendments and Supplements to the Decree on Special Areas of Conservation (Natura 2000 sites), and the Sečovlje salt pans became a Natura 2000 site [28].

The website of the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park features the following statement expressing hope that at least the proclamation of the Natura 2000 site will change something:

“In spite of the secured legal protection on a national scale (Decree of the Republic of Slovenia on the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park) and international protection framework (the Ramsar Convention Regulations), ideas about all kinds of encroachments upon the salt pans area and its transformation can still be detected in various (municipal and national) planning documents. For this very reason, the proclamation of Natura 2000 is no doubt of crucial importance, given that the state is obliged to protect and suitably conserve such areas” [28].

The comparison of the photographs leads us to the conclusion that the appearance and the function of the Canal of St. Bartholomew and its surroundings have changed drastically from the function of sea water supply to the salt pans to an illegal “harbor” for small boats inside the protected area. The last official aerial photograph of this area dates to 2017; however, as we observed during the field work, not much had changed by 2019.

## 2.2 Walking along the Canal of St. Bartholomew through an anthropological gaze

This part of the article is focused on mobile ethnography [5] and is based on walking around the area within a longer time period, aiming to read the place as a cultural landscape with multiple meanings, explaining various levels of reality embodied in the landscape: the material, socioeconomic, ideological or symbolic levels of the landscape, and the question of identity (local, domestic, foreign, and estranged). It will show how our knowledge about the Canal of St. Bartholomew was produced through the process of mobile ethnography. On the basis of photographs that were taken over a longer period of time (in 2010, 2011, and 2019), written and visual representations in social media (local newspapers, Facebook groups, and maritime forums), and various oral sources, such as informal occasional interviews with several interlocutors, we are going to show how the canal is constructed as a contested and liminal landscape [29].

From the main road leading to the border with Croatia, we turn right toward Seča. A view of the Church of St. Bartholomew and the salt pans opens to us. Some larger

buildings rise in front of the shimmering water, while smaller ones are surrounded by olive trees and some pines. We pass several houses and notice a bigger yellow one, a fountain, and a church. Then, we continue to the middle of the bridge, to the entrance of the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, and from the water side, we see the silhouette of abandoned and empty industrial buildings.

Going back, we can notice the Barcaffe's inscription on a broken advertising board and identify the former factory Začimba (Figure 9).

The Canal of St. Bartholomew is located on the margin of the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, which was the property of Mobitel, until this mobile telephony provider was sold to Telekom. The Canal of St. Bartholomew lies at the foot of the hill, where the scattered but big houses were built. Running along the canal is the local street, the Route of Health and Friendship, a walking and cycling route, Parenzana in Italian, Porečanka in Slovene. Parenzana was named after the former narrow railway connecting Trieste and Parenzo (Italian) (or Poreč in Croatian), which actually did not pass here (Figure 10).

In the Canal of St. Bartholomew, there are several berths for mainly sailing boats, speedboats, and rare fishing vessels. We go back from the bridge passing dilapidated buildings and a messy fenced courtyard where three buildings attract our attention with their colorful brick facades. After searching the site in Google on our smartphones, we learn that they are an old electricity transformer, a cultural home of salt pans workers, and an old boathouse. The older buildings were privatized together with newer socialist buildings and are now under monument protection, listed in the register of cultural heritage. However, as a private property, are they really protected behind a fence?



Figure 9: Former Začimba factory.



Figure 10: Bicycle lane along the Canal of St. Bartholomew.

A warning sign that the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park mounted on the boathouse in March 2016 advises boat owners to remove their boats or else they will be penalized for violating the Water Act and the Park Management Plan. The second sign states that the owners of vessels will receive a refund for the use of the infrastructure by the end of 2016, if they paid all the costs. So, were some moorings paid and made legal? Perhaps only those behind the old boathouse? Next to the old boathouse, there are waste containers bearing two inscriptions: “Do not leave waste in front of the container.” “If you do not consider this rule, you are a fool!” “Keep the water clean,” states the third sign.

Alenka turns and sees the crumbling piers behind the boathouse and the former Začimba factory (Figure 11). The view opens behind and in front of her. Are these the nostalgic motifs of demolished boats mentioned by one of the tourist websites? Boats everywhere. In some places, sailing boats are hidden behind the wild canes (*Arundo donax* in Latin) and tied to long and unstable makeshift wooden piers. The road along the Canal of St. Bartholomew, quite busy with vehicle traffic, is also a popular line for cyclists and walkers who stop and take photographs of the picturesque landscape. Two portable toilets were set up in the summer of 2019 on the waterfront, and we discover a new pier with marked boat registration one kilometer further down the route. Are the toilets intended for tourists? Or did those responsible provide them for boat owners? After almost 2 km down the route, a view of the widened canal and shallow water opens up. During low tide, the sludge appears, and the place looks really muddy and messy.

Finally, we see the “old traditional shipyard” (Figure 12). Luckily, it is high tide now, and the place does not look so brown. This is where the Bracera Society operates, with a few enthusiasts passing on old knowledge and





Figure 11: Boathouse.



Figure 13: Fonda fish farm.

preserving old vessels as cultural heritage. They renovate wooden vessels with old craft techniques and materials. The old shipyard, locally called “škver” (after the Italian variation squero, or Venetian squèro), is a thorn in the side of some apartment owners who rent their property to tourists. Considered as not being legally there, for some members of the Seča Civil Initiative, it is ecologically controversial due to varnishes and waste oils. Or are some people offended by the symbolic messages and images of, e.g., Marx, Tito, Che, and red stars on the walls of containers? The old shipyard was also where the legendary tourist ship Korala was renovated. Ironically, some from the Seča Civil Initiative believe that the ancient Roman walls that archaeologists discovered in water were built by shipyard users to gain the status of cultural heritage!

The next location is the Fonda Fish Farm, famous for its sea bass that is sold online and occasionally in high-end supermarkets. Known for its tourist visits of the fish farm, Fonda offers SUP excursions through its fishponds. Formerly owned by a local family that had lived by the

sea for generations, the fish farm was later sold and is today the property of an Italian company. Orange buoys, ripped nets, and piles of empty shellfish shells laying around the fishing piers may be an upsetting sight for some. Occasionally, the sharp smell of fish fills the air, which is another reason for complaints raised by some members of the Seča Civil Initiative. Luckily, today, the smell is blown away by *burja*, a strong coldish north-eastern wind. The company’s buildings are located near the fishing pier, where vessels purchased from the European Fisheries Fund are moored (Figure 13).

Although the pools, which were located along the beach 9 years ago, have been removed, contested space uses have been observed. This place seems somehow liminal, representing at once a landscape park, a fishing port for the locals or industrial aquaculture, and a beach for visitors of the sea.

On the opposite side of the fish farm and the fishing port is a payable parking lot for visitors, a cactus garden, a small animal farm with ponies in the shade of the Tuborg’s parasol, and the restaurant Ribič (Fisherman). There is an underwater archeological site at the cape, hidden from the visitor’s eyes. We can sit next to the folded sunshade, promoting the globalized Czech beer trademark Staropramen: The spirit of Prague. Rethinking about this place and locality, we are definitely not in that spirit! Having a globalized beer instead of former local ones, we can enjoy fresh air and strong wind, and, just like other strollers, watch kite surfers. There, the gaze opens a view toward the Bay of Piran, where the national border between Slovenia and Croatia is set, determined by arbitration, but not yet recognized by the Croatian side. Leaving the national border dispute aside, the place itself is, again, contested and in tension. Is this a place for relaxation, adrenalin sports? Is it



Figure 12: Traditional shipyard.

an archeological site or a neuralgic point (or more accurately, line) underscored by the ambitions for the conservation of cultural heritage, such as the salt pans and renovated old wooden ships?

Turning around, we note an additional slogan of another globalized beer brand Tuborg, which was present in the region during the time of the former Yugoslavia, after the Croatian Podravka, another food company, was granted license for its production [30]. The Tuborg slogan “open for more” on the parasol above the pony grazing in the nearby paddock reminds us of more open conflicts regarding the regulation and management of the Canal of St. Bartholomew. For the inhabitants of the Municipality of Piran and the local community of Seča, it has been a perpetual conflict point for 25 years because the area has not been managed properly since the mid-1980s, and the situation became even worse on the establishment of the Slovene state. Our interlocutors were literally talking about “floating shit,” and the situation was marked as “complete chaos,” where some boat owners “were taking free vacations,” while others abandoned their boats and let them sink, transforming locations along the Canal of St. Bartholomew into dumpsites (Figure 14).

In short, the area came across as “Little Texas” (a Slovene slang expression for a disorderly, chaotic place) according to the head of the Seča Civil Initiative [31]. In 2017, the Municipality of Piran undertook to remedy the situation; however, due to legal limitations, the cleaning of the area was only possible on land and not also in water.

So, what to do with the Canal of St. Bartholomew? Recently, it has been the subject of an audit of the Court of Auditors and a revision of management among various actors (the state, the responsible ministry, local communities, and the Soline company). The problem with the spatial management was registered in 2003. Only in 2011



**Figure 14:** Abandoned vessels and boats “in use” moored in the Canal of St. Bartholomew.

that the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning finally adopted the plan of management with the conservation and usage of the protected area, which was prepared for the Sečovelje Salina Nature Park. The state did not ensure the construction of the bridge and road, and the revision in 2017 pointed to the irregularities and inefficiencies of all involved. The state and the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning did not manage the place and did not rebuild infrastructures with prevention measures in the event of floods. The same ministry, likewise, failed to ensure the removal of the boats from the canal and an efficient inspection of illegally constructed piers, berths, and moorings. Although in 2009, the Municipality of Piran obtained the water rights to build the communal port with the possible support of interested investors, the revisor did not find any activities that would generate the municipality’s interest in constructing local communal berths. The activities of the private Soline company, which was granted the concession for managing and maintaining the infrastructure and embankment safety, were only partially efficient due to the limited implementation of area surveillance [8].

At the beginning of 2019, following the appointment of the new Minister of the Environment and Spatial Planning, the cleaning of the Canal of St. Bartholomew and the removal of submersed vessels began. The cleaning campaign was to be implemented by the Water and Investments Directorate, in line with the water and ecological management. According to some, the Canal of St. Bartholomew could be used for communal berths where the local inhabitants – and not people from central Slovenia – would moor their vessels. However, this idea seems controversial because those who still have moorings in the Canal of St. Bartholomew launched another civil initiative, insisting to keep the appropriated berths. In congruence with some interpretations of the international maritime law [32] and the Slovene Water Act, the berths in the canal are not legal, but on the other hand, they are not strictly prohibited and vessels may be moored there, because this area may be seen as a public good. In a similar vein, the possession of the berth, even illegal, seems like a fine prospect for acquiring berths in the future based on informal “ownership” and an opportunity to acquire them legally. This interpretation may provide the answer to the question as to why there is such a pressure on this place and why more and more vessels keep arriving in the Canal of St. Bartholomew.

In July 2019, a new conflict escalated, when the local political party GZOP and the Seča Civil Initiative objected to the construction of a new fishing port (near the Fonda aquaculture), berths for fishermen, fishery and aquaculture companies, and shellfish growers, which would be



financed through the European Maritime and Fishery Fund. The state could obtain funding from the EU, but the idea was rejected on the local level, and the Municipality of Piran rejected the financial plan at the first city council meeting [33]. Subsequently, the investment plan was passed and the municipality applied for two million euros from the European Maritime and Fishery Fund. The media reported about the conflict in the municipality, where certain political parties left the extraordinary meeting, claiming that it was illegitimate. The dispute also started on Facebook, revealing a huge discordance among multiple voices raised. Why now a fishing port near the Ribič restaurant and not local communal berths along the Canal of St. Bartholomew? How does the fishing port in the Canal of St. Bartholomew fit into the spatial plan of the Seča area because everything seemed interconnected? Why a fishing port for nonlocals and not management of illegally built houses, why not construct a road with sewage infrastructure instead of a fishing port for people who do not live in Seča and are therefore not locals? Another dispute arose over the claims that the fishing port and its piers should not be built of concrete, but with the use of natural materials, such as stone and wooden pillars. Others wondered how much the Canal of St. Bartholomew should be deepened. Why not instead erect a jetty to protect the salt pans? Wooden pillars and piers may seem an aesthetic solution, but this is problematic due to seashells, which burrow into and destroy them [34].

With a host of different issues escalating into a huge row, the conflict about the Canal of St. Bartholomew once again turned into an overheated topic during the long hot summer of 2019. Will the berths be communal for locals or for “continentals” or “occupiers,” wondered one of the participants in the Facebook discussion? The word *Ljubljančani*, the citizens of Ljubljana (the capital), is clearly used as a derogative word in this context. Who is behind the idea that the Canal of St. Bartholomew should be deepened: the ex-Fonda fish farm, the owners of the former Droga company, or a third actor? One journalist writing for the local newspaper inquired whether the Polič family, which bought the former socialist Začimba (Droga) factory, was planning to build a luxury tourist resort with berths for big, extravagant ships [35]. Should the Canal of St. Bartholomew be deepened for this reason? Where would the sediments be moved, was the question raised by other voices on Facebook. The dispute was further exacerbated by the requirement for the old shipyard Bracera to be removed from the area due to allegedly causing environmental degradation. The Municipality of Piran and the local community of Seča must retain the responsibility for the management of the Canal of St. Bartholomew. They should not allow the state with the

competent Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning and other institutions to overtake the management of the canal, which would strip the local community of Seča of its communal port, some actors explained [34].

At the moment of writing this article, in the autumn of 2019, the project for the construction of the fishing port and the management of the Canal of St. Bartholomew still needed to be negotiated and orchestrated among different actors involved in the dispute.

### 3 Discussion

Even though the Canal of St. Bartholomew lies inside the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, for several years, various actors have been pointing out that the area needs to be spatially regulated to reverse its degradation. The local residents look with uncertainty to the future of the dilapidated buildings of the former factory, which were largely built in socialism and are now in private ownership. Older buildings, which date back to Mussolini's time in the Kingdom of Italy, following the First World War, are protected by the Decree on the Protection of Monuments. On the outer edge of the landscape park, conflicts have lasted for more than two and a half decades over the controversial spatial management. The spatial management of the canal was very vaguely shared among the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park or its owner, the telecommunication services provider Mobitel, the Municipality of Piran, the local community of Seča, and the state with the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning and the Water and Investments Directorate. The tensions underscoring the dubious management of this seascape as well as the questions to whom the space belongs and for what purpose it should be used do not contribute to solving the ambiguous position of the area. The ambiguity lies in the future usage of the former factory, a possible transformation of previously smaller private fisheries with aquaculture into bigger foreign fisheries encroaching on the area, after the local fish farm was sold to the foreign owner as a trademark and after other nonresident shellfish growers became present in the fishing port.

In addition, ships that are larger than those moored in the existing port are expected to be present in the port in the future. Beside industrial fishermen, people use the space in the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park for recreation and leisure. Leaving aside the lack of sewage infrastructure of the over-dimensioned houses, various actors, with the exception of boaters from the Canal of St. Bartholomew, see the use of nautical tourism area as particularly

problematic, as the wastewater from the ships is considered to pose an ecological problem to the vulnerable environment.

While some actors associate nautical uses with the preservation of material cultural heritage – old wooden vessels in the old shipyard and archaeological remains of the old harbor – the opponents see this activity as an additional ecological threat to the already degraded area. Other actors are in favor of maintaining the old structure of the saltpans with neat embankments and canals, where mooring berths do not belong. Therefore, they oppose the presence of nautical tourism in the canal, while still others advocate the construction of piers for the locals and their small boats for pleasure or small-scale fisheries.

Paradoxically, in the mentioned area, there are now larger vessels of entrepreneurs in the fishing port, which are not considered by the people as locals, and aquaculture, according to some, shows the devastated image of the place. In the area of the Canal of St. Bartholomew, however, people have moorings without formal permits, speculating that they will be awarded moorings legally after having used them for many years. The same boat owners are also striving for regulation of this controversial liminal landscape. The popular interpretation of maritime law and public good is the reason for this liminality, and it is the reason why more and more boats are coming into the Canal of St. Bartholomew.

Abandoned boats in the canal represent one of the major reasons for disputes, and the responsibility for submerged boats is mainly placed on nonnatives. Despite the scandal over abandoned vessels that are becoming more and more like waste, the area is promoted as an attractive tourist destination due to its scenic setting. Similar to other users of the canal, there is also no consensus among the boat owners to whom the space actually belongs.

The Canal of St. Bartholomew is a liminal landscape, always in between the coastal area and the sea, on the edge or on the margin, far away from the center. Not allowed, but at the same time not strictly prohibited and removed, the boats are considered soon-to-be legally moored. It is a seascape that gave rise to very discordant voices. It is a seascape deeply involved in the contested usage of the place and as such a location where conflict easily goes on. At the same time, it is in tension with the socioeconomics of tourism; professional fisheries; aquaculture and shellfish farming one the one hand; ecology, conservation, and protection of natural values and cultural heritage on the other hand, as well as under the pressure of the complex political relationships between

international institutions, the state, the Ministry of the Environment, the Water and Investments Directorate, the Municipality of Piran, the local community of Seča, and several civil initiatives.

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