Article

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Women in the Socialist Fish-Canning Industry: Insights from the Yugoslav Adriatic Coast

https://doi.org/10.1515/soeu-2024-0063
Received November 22, 2024; accepted May 9, 2025

Abstract: This article discusses the implications of including women in the labor force of the fish-canning factories on the Adriatic coast in socialist Yugoslavia. The discussion is based on ethnographic interviews with former workers from the *Plavica* (Cres), *Kvarner* (Lošinj), and *Sirena* (Lastovo) canneries. The authors offer insights into the socially relevant discursive registers in which this gendered labor is situated. As they reminisced, the interviewees spoke about modernization, mobility, and women's emancipation as the dominant tropes of socialist industrialization, but also about perceptions based on strictly defined gender roles, insider-outsider dynamics, and local logics of social differentiation. The authors contextualize these workers' narratives and experiences in discourses on industrial labor and fish canning on the global scale. They observe how workers' memories and experiences in the Yugoslav socialist context contrast with the widespread perception of factory work as mundane and meaningless.

Keywords: industrial labor; socialist Yugoslavia; fish canneries; female workers; memory

Introduction

When we visited the town of Cres on the Croatian island of the same name to meet former workers of the *Plavica* fish cannery, we stopped by the old factory premises where we found an eponymous café. The establishment was decorated with photographs and objects related to fish canning and sold sardines from the *Mardešić*

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factory in Sali on the island of Dugi Otok, one of the few factories in the Adriatic still in operation. The café turned out to be a rare reminder of this industry and its workers in the public space of the eastern Adriatic coast that once belonged to socialist Yugoslavia. Its interior was dominated by a large reproduction of a photograph of a group of local women on a break from work (Figure 1). On the day the photo was taken, the workers had been celebrating the retirement of one of the factory's managers. They had been invited to his office, had photographs taken together, and eaten cake.[1] The picture captures them somewhat later, on a break from work. Here, they are dressed in white overalls and rubber boots, enjoying the rest of the cake, drinking coffee, laughing, and some are smoking cigarettes. This enlarged photograph capturing a snapshot of relaxed downtime in the factory reveals how labor in the fish-canning industry in socialist Yugoslavia, just as elsewhere, was clearly gendered and relied on a female workforce.

Based on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews with former workers of the *Plavica* fish-canning factory on the island of Cres (1896–1996), the *Kvarner* factories on the islands of Lošinj, Susak, and Unije (1912–1974), and the *Sirena* factory on the island of Lastovo (1932–1968), this article discusses the meanings and implications of including significant numbers of women in the labor force of the fish-canning factories on the Adriatic coast in socialist Yugoslavia. During our many visits to these locations, we conducted formal interviews, but also held informal conversations, or

Figure 1: Women from the *Plavica* factory, Cres, during a coffee break. Source: Personal archive of Anka and Nikola Koljevina, Cres.

1 We learned about the context of the photograph during the interview conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis with G. F., Cres, 1 October 2022.

listened in as former workers spoke to one another. Unless specified otherwise, our findings derive from our conversations with former cannery workers during our fieldwork and thus reflect a substantiated conclusion about what we heard and learned.

Our study thus offers insights into the detailed discursive texture of the socially relevant registers in which gendered labor is contextualized. Modernization, mobility, and women's emancipation were among the dominant tropes of socialist industrialization. However, we also focus on how, at the same time, our interviewees often relied on strictly defined gender roles, on insider-outsider dynamics, and on local patterns of social differentiation. Our study asks about how this gendered industrial labor under socialism is remembered today and observes it in the broader context of female participation in industrial labor in Yugoslavia and beyond.

Historical Background

The beginnings of industrial processing of fish on the eastern Adriatic coast date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, a time when the area belonged to the Habsburg Empire. Fish processing was "often one of the first, if not only industrial endeavor in peripheral places" of the Adriatic coast and islands (Brunnbauer 2021, 2). The first canneries appeared in 1870 and 1880, some of them founded by French companies (Brunnbauer 2021; Jovanović, Galić, and Mackelworth 2010), while others were Italian or Austro-Hungarian. For example, the first fish cannery in the town of Cres was opened in 1896 by the Trieste branch of the British–Austrian *Anglobank* (Figure 2), which took over the French food processing company *Société Générale*

Figure 2: The *Plavica* factory on Cres, unidentified date. The sign bearing the name Plavica indicates that the photograph was taken in or after 1956, the year the factory adopted this name. Source: Cres Museum Archive.

Française de Conserves Alimentaires and opened eight factories on the Adriatic coast (Solis 2023, 15).

From the end of the 19th until the mid-20th century, 59 canneries were established, 32 of which were on Adriatic islands (Starc, Kaštelan-Macan, and Ćulin 1997, 26). As Brunnbauer points out in reference to the upper Adriatic, "it is indicative that the sardine industry began to boom […] after its major ports (Trieste, Fiume/Rijeka) had been connected to Central Europe by railway, making the transportation of cans to Vienna, Prague, or Budapest quick and cheap" (Brunnbauer 2021, 4–5). Beverin (2000) and also Buturić (1995) mention 27 fish-canning factories established before the First World War: 22 in today's Croatia; three in Slovenia; and two in Montenegro. By the end of the Second World War, this number had grown to 46 factories on the Croatian and Slovenian coast, with the latest established in 1960 (Brunnbauer 2020, 82). This local small-scale industry helped further industrialize the regions and communities which had traditionally been connected to Trieste, but which had been cut off from it as a consequence of the Second World War. Importantly, fish-canning had the potential to produce for export (Brunnbauer 2021).

Most of these small factories were closed during the deindustrialization of the Adriatic coast in the last third of the 20th century, which saw a radical shift toward a single industry – tourism. While some of the factories discontinued production, others were relocated to the hinterland, to Dalmatinska Zagora in Croatia and Pivka in Slovenia, or to regions even further away from the sea – in Serbia or Bosnia and Herzegovina.[2]

Hard, Stinky Female Labor and Its Social Value

In both the presocialist and socialist periods, women made up the majority of the workforce in fish canneries, while the management and technical staff were men. The inclusion of female workers in industrial work changed their position in society, enabling economic emancipation, which corresponded to a wider process in many industrial sites around the world. Women have always worked, but it was industrial employment which enabled them to earn money. This was especially appreciated in agricultural communities, including small coastal and island settlements, which had to transform the products of their work into money. Volpi

2 These relocations attracted significant public and media attention. See e.g. Ante Tomić, "Kako je bog mora Neptun isplovio s Visa u luku Niš." *Jutarnji list*. 28 January 2006. https://www.jutarnji.hr/naslovnica/kako-je-bog-mora-neptun-isplovio-s-visa-u-luku-nis-3376448 (accessed 7 June 2025); Suzana Kos, "Ribja tovarna gre v Pivko." *Žurnal24.si*. 25 September 2016. https://www.zurnal24.si/slovenija/ribja-tovarna-gre-v-pivko-206781#google_vignette (accessed 7 June 2025).

Lisjak relates a story from the Slovenian part of Istria, where female workers from rural areas were able to pay off their families' loans with what they earned in the fish canneries (Volpi Lisjak 2001, 135–50).

Female industrial workers around the world gained social recognition as wage earners; their role in their families changed; and they became involved in family decision-making on how to spend the money they brought home (Ruiz 1987). In Yugoslavia, the socialist social contract provided female industrial workers on the Adriatic coast additional rights and opportunities. They had steady employment along with the associated rights, including maternity leave, health and pension insurance. This granted them other benefits, such as the ability to take out a loan or acquire a family flat. Thus, Yugoslav employment policies strengthened the social position of female workers in their traditionally patriarchal communities (Jambrešić Kirin and Blagaić 2013, 50).

Many workers, such as those in the *Plavica* factory in the town of Cres, also valued small-scale benefits such as union loans, the collective purchase of foodstuffs for their individual households, or the opportunity to spend their family holidays in vacation homes paid for by the factory. Not all of these welfare services were available in all socialist factories, and they were more prevalent in late socialism than in the early postwar years of socialist Yugoslavia. Where they did exist, however, they significantly improved the living standards and position of the workers who received them (Bonfiglioli 2020; Archer and Musić 2017, 44–66).

While these industrial employment policies were introduced across Yugoslavia, the fish canneries on the Adriatic coast had some specific characteristics that significantly shaped the social dynamics of the small coastal communities. Work in the fish canneries involved especially hard physical labor and was not something that society valued highly. While female industrial workers more generally were accustomed to performing physical labor, working in a fish cannery was especially challenging. The women gutted and cleaned fish, which meant getting cut and bruised, with their hands immersed in cold, salty water for hours. They stood and walked around in factories awash with sea water. As they were the main workforce, they also managed all the heavy weights, loading and unloading boxes of fish from the fishing boats and carrying packages of canned fish weighing 18 kilograms each. The *Plavica* factory on Cres did not acquire its first forklift truck until the 1970s and heating does not seem to have been installed until the second half of the 1960s. As the company archives from many fish canneries, including *Plavica*, proved untraceable, we gathered this information from a former worker in the administration, who confirmed that the first heating was installed when *Plavica* began to operate under the auspices of the bigger company, *Adria*, in 1964.[3] In any case, workers were

3 Interview with G. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis, Cres, 1 October 2022.

exposed to different ambient temperatures, spending time in the cool house and often working outdoors on the open shop floor during the winter. Many workers recall the physical experiences of pain and cold. A. K. from Cres recounted a scene from one winter in the 1960s when inadequately clothed workers formed a chain from the fishing boat on the pier to the factory, passing frozen fish to each other with their bare hands. She emphasized how the sensation of frozen fish on her hands experienced on that occasion has remained a strong memory.[4]

Not only was the work in the canneries physically demanding, but it was also less respected than labor in other female-dominated industries such as textiles, tobacco, or tourism. Work in the fish canneries was accompanied by the distinct, strong, and persistent odor of fish (*friškina*), which was hard to get rid of, thus marking the workers in a specific way. Many remember how they were publicly ridiculed or insulted for their "stink".[5] They would "take" the factory "with them" outside working hours, as they would bring the stench of fish to buses, streets, and cafés. Their fishy odor would distinctly and negatively mark them as "factory women" (*tvorničarke*), as they were called on the island of Lošinj:

> Whenever someone came across us in town, they would say, "Uh, these factory women!" To ourselves, we did not stink. Once some of us were walking along the seafront, and a waiter in one of the cafes – he was young like us – said: "How they stink of fish!"[6]

> If we entered the café during our break, everybody else would leave. The smell was so unbearable.[7]

> Sardines are among the worst fish – you could smell their odor kilometers away. You can wash as much as you want – it stays for two days. The entire bus would smell of fish.[8]

Migrant Workers in the Fish-Canning Industry

Local women made up the majority of the workforce in the 1940s, 1950s, and at least part of the 1960s. However, with the development of tourism and other industries on the Adriatic coast, locals began to turn to other jobs, and the fish canneries opened

4 Interview with A. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Inge Solis and Tanja Radež, Cres, 9 February 2023.
5 On the cultural, social, and political implications of smell and odor, see Corbin 1986; Classen, Howes, and Synnott 1994; Henshaw 2014; Hurley 1997; Meisner Rosen 1997; Quercia, Rossano Schifanella, Aiello, and McLean 2015.
6 Interview with O. M., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Mali Lošinj, 12 April 2018.
7 Interview with Z. D., conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis, Cres, 31 October 2022.
8 Interview with I. Ć., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Lastovo, 19 September 2018.

their doors to labor migrants from other parts of Yugoslavia. This had a positive demographic effect on some islands (Jovanović, Galić, and Mackelworth 2010). It also greatly influenced local social and shop floor dynamics, as we observed in the two factories that employed migrants, *Kvarner* on the island of Lošinj and *Plavica* on Cres, while *Sirena* on Lastovo used local workers.

The migrant workforce came from the economically poorer hinterland in places like Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, or Gorski Kotar, but also from other Yugoslav regions. Although there were sociocultural differences and economic inequalities between these "internal" migrants, they were treated and viewed differently from the *Gastarbeiter* migrants who had left for Germany and elsewhere in the same period, and also to the economic migrants leaving the Yugoslav successor states today. We were repeatedly told by former fish-canning factory workers that, back then, many young women saw employment in the canneries as an opportunity for a life by the sea, which they had never seen before, and away from the strict and limiting patriarchal rules that had marked their previous domestic life.

On the other hand, fish canneries, as sites of labor that was physically challenging and of low social value, also offered employment to women who were regarded as inappropriate or unrespectable by the standards of traditional patriarchal morality, such as single mothers, "abandoned" women, or women who had fled from violent husbands or fathers. We were told, however, that at least on Cres, a considerable share of these workers did not stay at the factory for long, leaving soon after they came. Our interviewees recalled how some of the newly arrived migrants would vomit because of the unbearable odor of *friškina* and leave after just one day of work. "The ones that remained were those who did not have anywhere else to go and those who wanted to earn money," one worker explained.[9] For many, work in the fish canneries was more of a last resort than a first choice. At the same time, however, we could see that fish canneries provided stable employment, social benefits and status, economic stability and independence. Fish canneries thus offered a solution to social problems because they enabled women to change their family status or improve their weak economic position.

The vast majority of the workers we interviewed had been 15 to 19 years of age when they started working, with 15 the minimum employment age. Some did not specify their age, but stated that they had started work "after elementary school". It was repeatedly mentioned that one of the oldest workers in *Plavica* on Cres, the late E. M., started working at the factory when she was fourteen and half years old and that her "employment record book" (*radna knjižica*) had falsely stated that she was fifteen.[10] Her case was described as a memorable exception and we did not encounter

9 Interview with Z. D., conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis, Cres, 31 October 2022.

10 This was confirmed by N. K., E. M.'s daughter; interview conducted by Inge Solis, Cres, 31 January 2023.

any other cases of underage employment. At the end of the 1940s/early 1950s, however, underage employment was reported on the island of Korčula, for example. A Yugoslavia-wide law passed in 1946 had introduced seven years of compulsory schooling, but this applied only to those children who started school from that year on. Younger girls attending higher grades could and did work in Korčula's *Jadranka* fish cannery when they were still underage (Borovičkić and Vene 2020, 180).

The arrival of young, unmarried, and unaccompanied working women introduced new forms of social behavior to the traditional communities. The migrants worked and lived alone, many of them free to decide how to use their own money. One of our interviewees recounted how she chose not to send money home to her family, as she thought her father might have spent it on alcohol: "I was my own boss."[11] D. M., who moved to Cres from Bosnia and Herzegovina, explained that the primary reason she came to the factory was in pursuit of "freedom" and to escape from the control of her strict family: "I was fed up with asking for permission each time I wanted to go to the cinema. And I had also never seen the sea before."[12] As we will show, the interactions between the locals and the migrant workers, and between female workers in general, involved a certain amount of negotiation as to how a working-class woman should behave and what her social role was.

Migrant workers on Cres spoke about the sexism they experienced, from teasing and ridiculing to attempts by local men to forcefully enter the building in which they lived. In response, the *Plavica* fish cannery specifically assigned an older, physically strong female worker to take care of young migrants and remove unwanted visitors. Around that time, locals coined the derogative name *papaline* (sprats), which they used to refer to all female cannery workers. However, bitter memories of being ridiculed by local men for being a *papaline* in *Plavica* were most frequently invoked by migrant workers. If they were indeed singled out, this might be explained by their status as unaccompanied women, who were perceived as easier targets than the local female workers under the supervision and protection of their family.[13]

Women who worked and spent time outside of the control of their family were traditionally regarded as suspicious. This goes beyond the socialist context and relates to broader patriarchal values, opinions, and social norms. In many other patriarchal contexts, too, female industrial workers were seen as promiscuous, unrespectable, and immoral. Latin American historians of female industrial labor in

11 Interview with O. M., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Mali Lošinj, 12 April 2018.

12 Interview with D. M., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.

13 There was only one worker that did not perceive this nickname as derogatory, commenting that "sprat (*papalina*) is a nice, cute fish". The interviewee concerned was a local and an administrative worker. Interview with G. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis, Cres, 1 October 2022.

the 20th century observed that "factory labor was regarded as 'jeopardizing women's morals' because it placed them 'with the male sex in public where the protection of the family was absent'" (Lavrin 1995, 89–90, quoted after French and James 1997, 12). The factory was thus seen "as a sexually 'promiscuous' space in which fathers and husbands lost control of their daughters and wives" (French and James 1997, 11). A similar dynamic was noted in Portuguese and Newfoundland fish canneries (Cole 1991; Neis 1999).

Examples from the eastern Adriatic coast include the presocialist tobacco factories in Istria, where a form of "morality control" existed, given that the women who worked there were automatically regarded as promiscuous (Đorđević 2012, 82). The same characterization can be found in one of the rare literary works from the region whose heroine is a worker in a fish cannery – the novel *La ragazza di Petrovia* (The girl from Petrovia), by the Istrian writer Fulvio Tomizza ((1963) 2010).[14] The protagonist has several lovers and faces an unwanted pregnancy. Ideologically, socialist Yugoslavia supported and publicly celebrated working women and mothers (Bonfiglioli 2020) and portrayed prewar female workers as revolutionaries (Vodopivec 2015). However, despite this official rhetoric as well as the policies that actually improved working women's social position, the traits of patriarchal logic persisted and were reflected in industrial work (Bonfiglioli 2020, 37–8; Modrić 2018, 134–5), and this was especially true in the context of migration.

Social Dynamics on the Shop Floor

The shop floors at *Plavica* on Cres and *Kvarner* on Lošinj were characterized by a high level of social heterogeneity, which reflected the complexity of Yugoslav society. They were spaces in which social values and hierarchies were inscribed. On the one hand, their heterogeneity reflected the rapid social changes triggered by Yugoslavia's modernization efforts, including urbanization, industrialization, the liberalization of gender norms, mass education, and migration. On the other hand, these social spaces were marked by the persistence of old habits, behaviors, norms, and types of knowledge. Mutual distancing or association produced an idiosyncratic mix that challenged the relationships between the workers. The memories of the daily work and relations on the shop floor suggest that this was a space where diverse discourses, ideologies, and experiences met, from modern work principles and norms of behavior to patriarchal moralities and traditional forms of knowledge.

One basis for differentiation among workers was how modern an individual was perceived as being. In a conversation with a number of former white-collar workers

14 The Croatian translation, *Djevojka iz Petrovije*, was not published until 2010.

and younger blue-collar workers who had started working in the 1960s and 1970s, our interlocutors emphasized the difference between them and what they called "primitive" women. The main distinguishing factor was education, but also overall behavior, physical appearance, manners, and lifestyle. Most of the older women, both locals and immigrants, were illiterate, while most of the younger women had received some basic education. The workers who were formally educated made sure to underline this distinction. This could be associated with the Yugoslav ideals that held up education, industrialization, urbanization, and modern manners as positive features of "the new socialist person" (Duda 2017, 5).

Modernity was also expressed through having certain types of knowledge that were defined and required by a modern state. For example, not knowing your birth date was regarded as especially shameful. Employees who had started working in the 1950s and came from rural backgrounds never referred to themselves as "primitive", but sometimes indicated that they were aware of the gap between their past ("rural") and current ("modernized") selves. A female employee from a village on Cres who started work at *Plavica* in 1957 told us that she did not know her given name. When she applied for her baptism certificate so that she could get married, she discovered that she had been baptized with a different name from the one she used and with which she had registered at the factory. She had to change all of her documents.[15] Although we could sense during the interview that she was ashamed of having not known her actual name, she wanted us to understand how different young women from the villages had been before they learned to adapt to the new, industrialized, and modernized order of things.

In addition to all this, the canneries were also places of cultural diversity where workers with different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds came into contact with one another. Again, this is especially true for *Plavica* on Cres and *Kvarner* on Lošinj, where the workforce came from different parts of the islands and the mainland, while, as mentioned above, *Sirena* on Lastovo used the local workforce. While regional and ethnic affiliations were acknowledged, their importance should not be overestimated. Sociocultural differences and specific local patterns of differentiation were more important.

From the point of view of the workers living in the towns of Cres and Mali Lošinj where the factories were located, differentiation started with the workers who arrived from different villages on the same islands, because town dwellers of both Slavic and Italian origin spoke in Italian dialect, while the rural population spoke in Croatian dialect. After the war, the majority of the townspeople were of Slavic origin and continued to speak Italian dialect among themselves, although they could also speak Croatian. For example, K. K. from the village of Stara Vas on the island of Pag

15 Interview with A. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Inge Solis, and Tanja Radež, Cres, 9 February 2023.

came to Lošinj in 1958 to work in the *Kvarner* factory. She related how she socialized only with women from her own village, as her coworkers from Lošinj interacted in Italian and she could not understand them.[16] The linguistic difference marked her as the "other", although she came from the neighboring island and was of the same ethnic origin.

Another identity marker was locality, with the difference between urban and rural, on the one hand, and island and mainland, on the other, being of relevance. In the town of Cres, people differentiated between urban and rural dwellers from the same island, referring to the villagers as *venjske* (outsiders). Additionally, they drew a distinction between the islanders and people from the mainland, who they called *furešte* (foreigners). From the locals' point of view, all mainland migrants were *furešti*,[17] regardless of their origin and ethnic background. With the arrival on Cres of a significant number of migrant workers from Bosnia, the locals started to mark them as both *furešte* and "Bosnians". "It was irrelevant whether we were from Slovenia, Slavonia, or Gorski Kotar – we were all Bosnians to them," explained one of the migrant workers. While migrants were ambivalent toward their status as the "other", whether articulated as *furešte* or Bosnians, they recognized that ethnonationalism did not play a significant role in this logic of differentiation. Many workers, both migrant and local, emphasized that "there was no nationalism in the factory". "We did not know who was Croat, Serb, or Muslim," said one of the migrant workers.[18] These recollections, which we frequently heard during our fieldwork on the islands of Cres and Lošinj, reflect migrants' postsocialist and current experience, in which ethnonational affiliation is the primary identity marker and marked by the recent history of ethnic conflict.

Lastly, the interaction between the workers was not only influenced by perceived similarities and differences in behavior, belonging, and lifestyle, but also by pragmatic negotiations over their position in the competitive piece rate work system. A piece rate pay structure meant that each worker had to complete a certain amount of work in order to receive a full paycheck. If workers exceeded the production target (*norma*) – that is, if they produced more units than required – they earned additional wages. Under this system, pace of work and physical position were critical. For example, the positions at the beginning of the production line were regarded as easier, as there was enough space for the rapid disposal of fish cans. The end of the assembly line was packed with cans, and workers had to "waste" time and

16 Interview with K. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Mali Lošinj, 8 June 2018.

17 *Furešti* and *furešte* (foreigners) are gender-specific plural forms. *Furešti* designates the plural for males or a mixed gender group, while *furešte* designates exclusively women.

18 Interview with D. M., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.

risk injury pushing their cans to the others. There was an unwritten rule that the positions at the beginning of the line were taken by the "old" workers, mostly locals, while "new" workers, who were largely though not exclusively migrants, had to take positions at the end of the line. According to the same unwritten rule, "old" workers had the right to choose which boxes of fish they would process and had the knowledge needed to identify those that would be easier to process – for instance, boxes with thawed or "bad" fish, which would be discarded. All of this created tension between the "old" and "new" workers, which was often translated as tension between locals and "Bosnians".

The Factory as a Center of Social Life

These dynamics of internal differentiation notwithstanding, in our conversations, the workers underlined that solidarity, collaboration, and unity on the shop floor were the most important parts of their experience and memories. They told us how they assisted their inexperienced or sick colleagues when they were unable to reach the production target; helped coworkers in need, such as single mothers; showed solidarity when it came to protecting their common interests; and simply enjoyed time together, singing and joking.[19] Thus, fish canneries were communities with complex networks of relations, where camaraderie existed alongside internal differentiations and conflicts. But it is the solidarity and not the conflict that workers choose as the dominant frame to relate their past experiences. Such experiences of solidarity are a central part of all the available ethnographies of the Yugoslav fish canneries during socialism, including those with a focus on the *Jadranka* factory on the island of Korčula (Borovičkić and Vene 2018), on several factories on the island of Hvar, produced for an exhibition at the Stari Grad Museum curated by Veronika Gamulin (Gamulin, Čavić, and Novak Kronjac 2018), as well as on Zadar's *Adria* factory, by investigative journalist Ivana Perić.[20]

Although work on the fish-canning factory shop floor was hard, repetitive, unpleasant, and physically demanding, this was rarely a reason for employees to dismiss their work experience as negative – something which is at odds with the main tropes of labor history. Negative perspectives on monotonous and hard labor have been linked to the capitalist economy by critics of class relations from Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx (Engels 1845, Marx 1974 [1867]) to Walter Benjamin, who

19 For a collection of such stories of solidarity in the *Plavica* factory, see Kosmos and Solis 2023.

20 Perić, Ivana. 2020. "Zadnju riječ imaju radnice." *Libela.* http://libela.org/sa-stavom/-zadnju-rijec-imaju-radnice/ (accessed 3 June 2025); Perić, Ivana. 2020. "Kako smo živjele i preživjele." *Libela.* http://libela.org/sa-stavom/-kako-smo-zivjele-i-prezivjele/ (accessed 3 June 2025).

distinguished "between the 'ideological boredom' of the upper classes and the 'monotone Sisyphean work in the factory', characteristic of the 'lower' social strata" (Benjamin 1999, 106, quoted after Matošević 2021, 55–6). Many scholars of Western, or global, labor history also point to workers' alienation. For example, researching how workers subjectively experienced work in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s, sociologist Robert Blauner described dimensions of self-estrangement, powerlessness, meaninglessness, and social isolation (Blauner 1964, 68). In his ethnography of the role of music among shop floor workers in a blinds manufacturing and fitting firm in England, Marek Korczynski reveals music as an oppositional practice centrally related to workers' sense of alienation (Korczynski 2014, 91) – "often, too often, time on the factory floor was experienced as alienated time – empty, meaningless, slow, and boring" (Korczyinski 2014, 73).

The memories of women who used to work at the *Plavica* and other fish-canning factories in socialist Yugoslavia are different. For them, the repetitive, exhausting labor was not a reason to retrospectively regard their working experience as alienating, pointless, damaging, or humiliating. Most of the women we interviewed talked about their work in these factories with pride, even nostalgia, which was sometimes even expressed somatically, as in the case of O. M. from Lošinj, who said at the end of our interview: "I would pack fish now as well," making the same repetitive moves with her hands as those she had become accustomed to while working in the factory.[21] T. T., a female worker from Cres, compared the exhausting work on the can-sealing machine with her experience of the tightly connected factory community, concluding: "If I were to live my life again, maybe I would do everything the same – because of that friendship."[22]

The reason for such positive attitudes and the high value attached to factory labor lies in the different understanding socialist Yugoslavia promoted of workers and the working class, as compared to Western-style capitalist regimes of industrial labor. Yugoslav factories were loci of rich social life that encompassed not only labor, but also culture, entertainment, and education. Workers were understood as active sociopolitical subjects and not just as bodies performing labor. In the small coastal towns, the work in the canneries gave social life its rhythm, while the monotonous, repetitive rhythm of cutting fish by hand, packing fish into cans, packing cans into boxes, etc. was itself regulated by another rhythm, that of music. Contrary to Korczynski's (2014) findings for England, music in Yugoslav canneries was no act of resistance to the rhythm of production – it was in fact in harmony with it. Important aspects of the workers' social life in and around the fish-canning factories were

21 Interview with O. M., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Mali Lošinj, 12 April 2018.

22 Interview with T. T., conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis, Cres, 15 October 2022.

music, singing, and dancing. Songs dominate the memory soundscape of labor in fish-canning factories, a memory of musical accompaniment to work and life in the factory and beyond:

> When I first came to the factory, I saw these women – they were freezing cold, and they were singing.[23]

> It was nice back then, music, good company, we were singing constantly, music was also played on loudspeakers, there were songs that were modern at the time, such as *Kad si kupim mali motorin* ["When I buy myself a little motorbike", by one of the most well-known Yugoslav singer-songwriters, Marko Novosel].[24]

> We sang a lot. Zdenka Dalmatinka [a coworker from Dalmatia] was the one who sang most often. [Interviewee starts singing the old songs].[25]

> For every 1 May, the army would organize a dance party; we danced quite a lot.[26]

The work in the fish-canning factory, although hard and sometimes performed under extremely poor conditions, simultaneously offered employees the means to build their self-esteem and value *as workers* and members of the community. Our interlocutors spoke with pride of their professional skills and willingness to work hard:

> We had to reach the production target [*norma*]: we cut heads, put fish into salty water, and then fried them. [She explains everything with hand gestures.][27]

> We would always exceed the production target, all of us; we were young. We would clean more than four crates of fish an hour.[28]

The workers expressed similar pride regarding their products, emphasizing that "our products were of top quality"[29] and that "we were always congratulated for the good quality of our products".[30] They stressed that fish canning was a "clean"

23 Interview with G. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis, Cres, 1 October 2022.
24 Interview with A. G., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Lastovo, 19 September 2018.
25 Interview with K. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Mali Lošinj, 8 June 2018.
26 Interview with A. G., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Lastovo, 19 September 2018.
27 Interview with D. M., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.
28 Interview with O. M., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Mali Lošinj, 12 April 2018.
29 Interview with R. T., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Mali Lošinj, 12 April 2018.
30 Interview with M. S., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Mali Lošinj, 13 April 2018.

industry "without chemicals",[31] meaning that there were no preservatives added and the remnants were biodegradable. S. V. from Cres proudly described their products "as the cleanest product you can imagine": "We would clean and wash fish, then put it in the can, and then wash it again before heating."[32] These words point to the importance of the relationship between the workers and the products of their labor that extends way beyond the fish-canning industry. The centrality of this connection reflects a working-class culture "that insisted on the ethic of the craft and, quite literally, on craftiness at the workplace, both vis-à-vis machines and the work process" (Muehlebach 2017, 122). A worker from the northern Italian town of Sesto San Giovanni near Milan articulated this importance thus: "I experienced a passion for the work we performed. Because even as this work was extremely tiring, we felt that we were creating something" (Muehlebach 2017, 123).

Ethnographies on fish canning in various places around the globe do not always report similar experiences and memories of interconnectedness between workers and their labor. Women in fish canneries in British Columbia (1870s–1980s) and Newfoundland, Canada (1950s–1990s), as well as Portugal (1960s–1980s), for instance, do not reminisce about their experiences of cannery work being part of their identity. Nor do they share fond memories of socializing in their factory's community. Rather, for many, this was hard work performed out of pure necessity (Muszynski 1996; Cole 1991; Neis 1999). Muszyinski (1996) and Neis (1999), for example, look at working and payment conditions and policies – Muszyinski in British Columbia and Neis in Newfoundland – investigating the exploitation and discrimination of women and racial minorities. Muszynski describes the different identifications and emotional investment of workers (Muszynski 1996, 21–2). Although not focusing directly on this topic, from the context Neis describes – fish plants paying the lowest wages, discriminating between male and female wages, and serving as a temporary solution to the problems of deprivileged women – the reader understands that the plants did not generate noticeable identifications, emotional investments, and social interactions.

The absence of emotional investment in one's work as found in these ethnographies may or may not be representative of the global history of fish canning, however. In an autobiographical and historical essay, Katherine Ringsmuth, daughter of a superintendent of one of Alaska's canneries, underlines how well the management cared for the workers, providing them with rich and diverse meals. She also observes strict racial segregation and discrimination in the cannery, but implies that racial divisions had become blurred by the 1970s, when college student workers

31 Interview with G. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.

32 Interview with S. V., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Cres, 10 February 2023.

engaged in camaraderie with other ethnic groups in Alaska's canneries.[33] This account notwithstanding, emotional investment in one's work appears to be intrinsically connected to its wider sociopolitical context. All of the fish-canning enterprises scrutinized in the aforementioned ethnographies, culturally, geographically, and temporally different as they were, were set in socioeconomic contexts of industrial capitalism, which included the creation and exploitation of cheap wage labor. Muszynski's (1996) economic analyses of canning in British Columbia as well as Muñoz-Abeledo's (2006) analysis of Franco's Spain show that preexisting gender and racially defined social roles and relations were used to create a job classification system in which women and racial minorities received lower wages and faced poorer working conditions regardless of the work they performed. Traditionally regarded as low-value industrial work, fish canning in this context involved disproportionally harsher working conditions and low wages that did not provide for workers' basic needs.

Muszyinski's work on British Columbia's canneries in particular underlines the strict segregation and discrimination based on gender and race. Her case illustrates that there is no universal industrial experience, but rather that it should be explored and understood along class, gender, and racial lines. For example, white fishermen working for canneries did base their identities on their work. They had more autonomy in their jobs and significantly better working conditions than women and racial minorities, who thus had little opportunity to identify with their daily work. On the other hand, while Canadian Aboriginal women took "enormous pride" in their cannery work, this was not linked to the cannery's system of working and social relations, but rather to the tradition and experience of the Aboriginal community, in which the fish economy is of central importance for the preservation of the collective (Muszynski 1996, 21–2; 1988).

In Portugal, with the industrialization of fish canning since the 1960s, female work led to an erosion of women's position in society. Compared to the country's preindustrial maritime communities, where women had participated in the economy through work such as fishing, female industrial wage earners in the canneries lost out on several levels. They lost economic autonomy, decision-making authority over their time and labor, which exacerbated their double burden of domestic and factory work, and they lost the close-knit network of female companions they had formed under the previous economic model (Cole 1991). This is the opposite of what was observed during Yugoslavia's experience of industrialization which took place in the same period – here, employment conditions significantly improved the economic and social position of women (Jambrešić Kirin and Blagaić 2013; Bonfiglioli 2020).

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33 Ringsmuth, Katherine. "Mug-up: The Role of the Mess Hall in Cannery Life." Blog of the Alaska Historical Society. 18 June 2013. https://alaskahistoricalsociety.org/mug-up-the-role-of-the-mess-hall-in-cannery-life/ (accessed 4 June 2025).

These differences in women's experiences in the fish-canning industries in the Yugoslav Adriatic and other parts of the world are linked to the divergent socio-economic contexts: variants of industrial capitalism, on the one hand, and Yugoslav socialist industrialization and modernization, on the other. Moreover, the narratives from fish canneries in the Yugoslav Adriatic correlate with women's experiences in other industries in Yugoslavia, including the textile (Bonfiglioli 2020; Modrić 2018; Vodopivec 2019; 2021) and the plastic industry (Jambrešić Kirin and Blagaić 2013). Women all remember the hard work, low wages, and their double burden, but also pride, agency, and sociability, as well as joy and fun.

The fish-canning industry in the eastern Adriatic was part and parcel of the wider Yugoslav socialist modernization project. Factories were to bring progress in terms of providing employment, producing goods, and raising social standards by redistributing industrial income to public services and infrastructure. Owned by society and self-managed, the factories generated income that was to be distributed by those creating it: managers and workers, represented by workers' councils. While the extent to which the workers *actually* participated in the decision-making processes is debatable, their mere inclusion in decision-making procedures produced a sense of entitlement. Workers saw themselves as active and necessary participants in industrial operations and in society in general, and expected their investment to be recognized by other social actors (Vodopivec, forthcoming).[34]

In other words, Yugoslav socialist industrialization shaped workers' social roles both discursively and practically, thereby also influencing their self-perception – they saw themselves as important social actors. Crucially, while hard work and low wages were features of almost all cannery jobs, in the Yugoslav context this was not understood as mere economic exploitation for someone else's private profit. Not only did the Yugoslav modality of hard work result in wages, which enabled economic survival, but they also had important social functions, given that this hard labor was related to healthcare, housing, and childcare provisions and intertwined with culture, education, and leisure activities. The social role of factories was framed as important even when those factories did not generate positive revenue. The workers recalled how *Plavica* on Cres received financial support from government or local sources when it had operational and financial problems, but it never lost its social importance: "The factory needed to survive, even when operating inefficiently. It employed a hundred workers, which is no joke," explained one of our interlocutors. She proudly described how she encountered both tourists and neighbors who complained that the factory stank. When a neighbor threatened to damage the factory's drainage because of its odor, she

34 We would like to thank Nina Vodopivec for sharing her unpublished article on socialist democracy in Yugoslavia and workers' participation in self-management.

replied: "You do that, and I will send you a hundred workers so you can give them their paychecks."[35]

As this example shows, labor in canneries was socially devalued everywhere. But in Yugoslavia, socialist industrialization shaped workers' self-understanding both as laborers and social actors. The women working in the canneries had their own way of responding to insults regarding the bad smell associated with their labor. They knew how to negotiate and emphasize the social value of the work they performed:

> I worked in the factory and smelled of fish, but I always took care to ensure my clothes matched. [She illustrated this by pointing to a photograph of herself, see Figure 3].[36]
>
> When we came back from work, they would say that we stank of fish – but that's normal when you go out to work. You smell of the environment where you work.[37]
>
> I was working in the administration, but I would go to the shop floor to chat. Then I would go out to the SDK [*Služba društvenog knjigovodstva*, the municipal bookkeeping service] and they would say that I smelled of fish. And I would reply: "I work in the factory."[38]

Figure 3: Workers from the *Plavica* factory on Cres. Source: Personal archive of Anka and Nikola Koljevina, Cres.

35 Interview with G. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis, Cres, 1 October 2022.
36 Interview with A. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.
37 Interview with K. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Mali Lošinj, 8 June 2018.
38 Interview with G. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos and Inge Solis, Cres, 1 October 2022.

> My son once told me: "Mama, you smell like fish!" And I responded: "Maybe I stink, but my money doesn't!"[39]

> When these Bosnian women got their salaries, they would go to Rijeka [to shop for clothes] and dress like fashion models! They would also go to the hairdressers.[40]

Importantly, the labor, however hard, was just one aspect of factory life. The other equally significant factor was socialization, through both formal and informal activities – spending time together, having fun during working hours, travelling to other factories, and going on group trips and excursions organized by the union (*sindikalni izleti*). The stories of the former fish factory workers confirm Susan Woodward's observation that in Yugoslav socialism, "employment status defined the identities, economic interests, social status and political loyalty of Yugoslav citizens. One's place of work was the center of one's social universe" (Woodward 2003, 76).

The former fish factory workers we spoke to remember this "social universe" fondly and numerous photographs have been preserved in their personal archives (Figure 4). These images supplement the memories and are in keeping with the narrative of "the good life" ascribed to socialist Yugoslavia in the 1970s and, albeit increasingly less so, the 1980s (Duda 2010; Grandits and Taylor 2010):

> We used to barbecue on the factory premises. We didn't hide it; the director knew and ate with us. But production never suffered because of it. I repeat, production never suffered.[41]

> We stayed at a hotel in Gerovo for seven days – everything was paid for by the company. We were socializing all the time. We joined the "Ways of the Revolution" (*Putevima revolucije*) and the company paid for everything again.[42]

> We really used to have fun and do all sorts of things. Always in good company.[43]

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39 Interview with A. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.

40 Interview with A. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.

41 Interview with N. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.

42 Interview with A. K., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018. The "Ways of the Revolution" (*Putevima revolucije*) was part of Yugoslav mnemonic politics and included organized excursions to monuments and other sites related to the People's Liberation Struggle in the Second World War. This phenomenon was covered by a comprehensive exhibition held in 2015, see "Putevima Revolucije: Memorijalni turizam u Jugoslaviji (The Ways of the Revolution – Memorial Tourism in Yugoslavia)". SF:ius – Social Fringe: Interesting Untold Stories. https://www.sfius.org/en/izlozba-putevima-revolucije-memorijalni-turizam-u-jugoslaviji/ (accessed on 4 June 2025).

43 Interview with T. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Lastovo, 19 September 2018.

> We went to Zadar to hold meetings and attend the workers' councils.[44]
>
> We had great parties. For the Day of the Republic, we would make flower garlands and decorate the factory. For Women's Day, there was a big celebration because we are all women. People today don't party like we used to.[45]

That this "good life" was the result of a process prompted by socialist Yugoslav social policies closely related to industrialization becomes all the more evident when one compares the memories of these times with the preceding decades. Memories of the 1950s and early 1960s are more ambivalent and testify to the harsh working and living conditions (Kosmos and Solis 2023, 49–51; also Borovičkić and Vene 2018).

The fish-canning factories created a community life that went beyond both the factory premises and the working hours. Just as in Yugoslav companies elsewhere, in the small coastal and insular towns they gave rhythm and form to social life. The factories attracted workers from other parts of Yugoslavia, which significantly shaped the demography of these places – both in terms of the immigration prompted

Figure 4: The workers of the Plavica cannery celebrating International Women's Day on 8 March in the 1980s. Source: Personal archive of Anka and Nikola Koljevina, Cres.

44 Interview with G. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.

45 Interview with G. F., conducted by Iva Kosmos, Tanja Petrović, and Martin Pogačar, Cres, 6 June 2018.

by industrialization and, later, of the depopulation that was a consequence of deindustrialization (Jovanović, Galić, and Mackelworth 2010). Cultural life and leisure, too, were shaped by the factory – either directly, through the work collective, or through the workers maintaining the relationships they established on the factory floor in their free time. Many parties were organized by the different industries and companies in the towns, as was the case in Cres:

> Companies used to organize dance parties. The shipyard (*škver*) organized parties on the first and last Saturday of each month. They were held in Hotel Kimen […]. In the summer, we would go out to the cinema, to restaurants. We complained about life back then, but it was better than today. We would go out […]. If you felt like eating gnocchi – you'd go to a restaurant and order gnocchi.

This quote illustrates how memories are shaped by the situation people find themselves in today. Our interlocutors often emphasized (seemingly) small pleasures such as eating gnocchi at a restaurant, attending parties, and going on trips organized by their factories. In doing so they juxtaposed their past experiences with the present-day situation. Along today's Adriatic coast, industry has all but disappeared – with the sole exception of tourism. Both infrastructures and people's everyday practices and habits are subordinated to tourists' apparent needs. Today, workers rarely go out to restaurants or make use of other infrastructure developed for tourists – because it is not intended for them, but also because they cannot afford it. Furthermore, providing employees with leisure activities and offering them an infrastructure and opportunities to travel, spend their vacations at tourist resorts, and celebrate public holidays together are no longer things that employers see as their responsibility. The fond memories of having the means and opportunity to spontaneously sit down for a plate of gnocchi at a restaurant and go dancing should be read as a counterpoint to the workers' current situation. Those with firsthand experience of socialism articulate the difference between the two social contracts – the socialist and the neoliberal one – which govern the work and life of those employed in industry and other sectors alike.

Conclusion

Memories of gendered, female labor in the fish-canning industry in Yugoslavia in the second half of the 20th century have much in common with memories of this kind of labor around the globe. They are built around recognizable tropes of hard, repetitive, demanding, socially undervalued, and unwanted labor as well as the bad odor this labor was associated with; harsh, even unhealthy, working conditions; and the low

status that was ascribed to it. As this paper shows, however, in Yugoslavia, such labor also provided a specific sociality and meaning.

The fish-canning industry that was bound to local communities and maritime ecologies is disappearing the world over, together with the social environment it had created and maintained. In the former Yugoslav context, erstwhile cannery workers are, more often than not, the only ones to reminisce about the decades these factories were in operation. Public memorializations of the labor history of fish canning are rare. Any that do occur are, as a rule, a result of efforts by local individuals, institutions, and communities. In 2015, a museal collection centered on fish canning was established in Izola, Slovenia, by Srečko Gombač, a local economist and author, at his small Parenzana Railway Museum, which had to close in November 2016.[46] In 2018, the Stari Grad Museum in Hvar organized the exhibition "From *baraka* to *fabrika*: Fish Processing on the Island of Hvar" (Gamulin, Čavić, and Novak Kronjac, 2018). The *Siva zona* (Gray Zone) organization in Korčula has been working on a project entitled *Industrijska baština otoka Korčule* (Industrial heritage of the island of Korčula), which includes research on the heritage of fish processing on the island (Borovičkić and Vene 2016).[47] In 2020, journalist Ivana Perić published a series of articles on the independent media portal *Libela* about the operation and demise of Zadar's fish-processing giant *Adria*.[48] In 2023, the Cres Museum in cooperation with the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (*Znanstvenoraziskovalni center Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti*, ZRC SAZU) organized an exhibition on the *Plavica* factory (Kosmos and Solis 2023), which in 2024, was also hosted by the City Museum of Rijeka.[49]

Today, tourism is the dominant economic activity along the coast of the former Yugoslavia. The lack of effort to make the history and heritage of fish processing part of tourism is somewhat surprising. Unlike in other places around the globe such as Lisbon in Portugal, Stavanger in Norway, and Monterey in California, there is little to no interest in promoting and commodifying fish canning as sociocultural heritage in Izola, Lošinj, Cres, Hvar, Lastovo, and other locations on the eastern Adriatic where fish-canning factories existed in the 19th and 20th centuries.

While we were working on this article, the *Plavica* café, with which we began our narration, unexpectedly closed. Later, a new burger and ice-cream bar *La Fabbrica*

46 Boris Šuligoj, "Kolenc jih meče na cesto, ker hoče boljši muzej." *Delo*. 15 November 2016. https://old.delo.si/novice/slovenija/kolenc-jih-mece-na-cesto-ker-hoce-boljsi-muzej.html (accessed 4 June 2025).

47 "Industrijska baština otoka Korčule." siva) (zona. 22 July 2016. http://sivazona.hr/pages/industrijska-bastina (accessed 4 June 2025).

48 Perić. "Zadnju riječ imaju radnice"; Perić,. "Kako smo živjele i preživjele."

49 "The Exhibition Plavica, Cres Fish Processing Factory." Muzej Grada Rijeke. https://www.muzej-rijeka.hr/en/the-exhibition-plavica-cres-fish-processing-factory/ (accessed 4 June 2025).

opened in its place. Despite its name, unlike its predecessor, the new restaurant shows no signs of remembrance of the history of fish canning. Indeed, there are only a small number of material objects remaining as reminders of the history of socialist-era fish canning in the eastern Adriatic. Some workers saved a tool, scissors, a stool, or an employment record book in their private archives. Many have photographs of the factory and their fellow workers in their family albums, testifying to the central role of the factory in their biographies.[50]

We found occasional traces in official archives, but the latter have rarely preserved documents related to the socialist industry. One example is a photo album from the *Mirna* fish-processing factory in Rovinj, which contains images of celebrations, gatherings, and training courses, once again testifying to the sense of community and social bonds between the workers. In describing this album, Brunnbauer notes that "what is conspicuous in these photos is the confident expression of most of the women" (Brunnbauer 2021, 15), which speaks to the findings of this study about a world of work that can cannot be reduced to sites of unwanted, hard physical labor that scarcely provided for workers' basic needs, as was the case in many capitalist-run fish canneries.

A rare exception to the absence of fish-canning history in public space can be found in the village of Banjole near Pula, on the southern tip of the Istrian peninsula. Here, citizens initiated the erection of a sculpture in the form of a half-open fish can near the site where the fish-canning factory used to be and where now a newly built hotel dominates the landscape (Figure 5). In June 2013, the sculpture was inaugurated by then president of the municipality Goran Buić and 82-year-old Nela Žarković, "who spent 36 years working in the cannery" and "was twice declared best worker, with only fond memories binding her to the factory".[51] A blue plaque carries an inscription in Croatian, Italian, German, and English. The English text reads: "This sculpture tells the story of the sardine factory Angelo Parodi, Učka, Istra, Mirna from early 1927 to 1990. On [sic] her place today rises the aparthotel Del Mar." It thus lists all names that the factory had during the 70-some years of its existence. The possessive pronoun "her" refers to the factory; in Croatian, the word *fabrika* is feminine.

The Croatian text on the plaque is the only one that goes into more detail. In our translation, we keep the word *fabrika* as in the original Croatian text, since this is a regional form that entered Croatian via the Italian term for factory, *fabbrica*. Standard Croatian would be *tvornica*.

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50 For more on the photographs of the *Plavica* factory and their meaning, see Kosmos 2020.

51 A. Šimić. "Banjole: Škatula od sardina podsjetnik na bolje dane." *Glas Istre*. 23 June 2013. https://glasistrenovine.hr/arhiva-portala/pregled-vijesti/banjole-skatula-od-sardina-podsjetnik-na-bolje-dane-412095 (accessed 4 June 2025).

Figure 5: The monument to the fish-canning industry in Banjole, Croatia. Source: Courtesy of Tanja Petrović.

> From the very beginning, the *fabrika* was of great economic and social importance for the inhabitants of Banjole and its neighboring settlements (Premantura, Pomer, Medulin, Ližnjan, Vinkuran, Šišan, and even Pula). In the 1970s, at the peak of its development, the *fabrika* employed around 300 female workers in production and 150 fishermen, as well as other support staff. During that period, it built a fleet of ten fishing boats. There was a cinema hall, a dance hall, and a medical practice which regularly operated in the *fabrika*. The then director Mario Benvenuti made an important contribution to the development of the *fabrika*. Among other things, he organized a music school teaching various instruments, attended by around 15 factory workers. As a result, one could often hear accordion music in Banjole.

The emotional charge of this description emphatically proves the point this article has made: For the local community, the economic importance of the fish-canning industry was inseparable from its social importance, and this was particularly true

for the decades of Yugoslav self-management. Through cultural activities and initiatives, workers could educate themselves and become emancipated sociopolitical subjects, as *workers* (e.g., Majstorović 1976; also Petrović 2021). This fact alone makes the preservation of this maritime industry's objects, narratives, and memories indispensable. The canneries' social role challenges and problematizes prevalent views of the fish-canning industry as hard, "primitive", unwanted, debilitating, "smelly", marginal, and highly undesirable in comparison with other sources of income such as tourism. However hard and undervalued the labor in canneries was, it nevertheless provided Yugoslav women, as the industry's main workforce, with tools for emancipation. It enabled them to gain skills, social capital, and value, and it opened a space in which they could live an active and meaningful social and collective life.

Acknowledgements: This article is a result of the research program "Historical interpretations of the 20th century" (P6-0347) financed by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency.

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