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## EXPLORING THE SPATIALIZATION OF CULTURE: PERSPECTIVES FROM SLOVENIAN ETHNOLOGY

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**Abstract:** The article presents observations on the intricate processes of localizing peoples and cultures, drawing on their spatial mapping, a practice known since antiquity. The introducing part outlines general views on the causal relationship between culture and environment. The Enlightenment put forward the hypothesis of environmental determinism, which provided a rationale for linking people, cultures, and geographies well into the 20th century, particularly in anthropogeography and culture-area research. The isomorphism of space/place and culture characterized research until the late 20th century when the postmodern turns called it into question. The theory of practice and the spatial turn proved particularly influential in anthropology and ethnology. In this field, the central concept of culture has been deconstructed; this has stimulated debates about ethnography as a genre of “writing culture” and fieldwork as a locally grounded research practice. The second part of the text shows how Slovenian ethnology in the 20th century pursued cultural area research shared with other European regional or national ethnologies that focus on the national territory. However, research has not shown a clear correspondence between cultural and ethnic/national boundaries. In this respect, ethnology has maintained a critical distance from cultural essentialization. On the other hand, it has not particularly reflected upon space; space has functioned as the natural environment, the obvious background of culture. In this respect, the reception of the spatial turn brought a particular sensitivity to studying spatial practices and experiences and refining research methodologies.

**Keywords:** human geography; culture; spatial turn; anthropology of space and place; Slovenia

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1. Historical scraps on “stable” liaisons between geographies and cultures

Ethnological and geographical knowledge are inextricably interwoven, as evidenced by the enduring interest in culture, people, and the territories they inhabit. This tendency can be attributed to the fundamental human capacity to perceive and categorize others based on their proximity and familiarity, i.e., to think about *we* (who are) *here* and *others* (who are) *there* or about *the domestic* (the known, the familiar), and *the foreign* (the different, the other). In general, interest in cultural manifestations has focused on three fundamental axes of inquiry: studying human communities and analyzing spatial and temporal dynamics. An

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essential element in addressing the intersection between geographical knowledge and ethnological pursuits was conceptualizing the relationship between space, predominantly understood as a natural environment, and the people who inhabited it; it entailed their distribution in different geographical areas and their cultural characteristics or mentality.

Speculations about geographical (or environmental) determinism have a long history, originating in Antiquity and continuing into the Modern Era. During this period, there was a growing interest in explaining the causes or reasons for differences between people. Observations were based primarily on empirical knowledge (Gr. *aisthesis*, i.e., sensory and experiential observation). In ancient Greece, historians (laographers, chronographers, and travelers) distinguished their society from the Barbarians; the latter were perceived as inhabiting foreign lands in a northern, colder climate. They spoke an unintelligible language, adhered to an enigmatic religion, engaged in curious customs, and exhibited a distinctive mentality. Environmental causes explained these differences; Hippocrates' treatise *Airs, Waters, Places* is a famous text on this topic. They were also convinced that the environment was a factor that was imprinted on physical appearance (e.g., skin color). Of particular interest from the Middle Ages are the reflections of Ibn-Khaldun, a Tunisian-born polymath, who postulated that the physical environment created differences in lifestyle and mentality between nomadic and sedentary peoples. His book *Muquaddimah* or *Prolegomena* (1377) is considered one of the earliest works of social scientific thought.

Cultures were classified and mapped in popular encyclopedias and cosmographies as early as the Middle Ages and the early modern period. Representations were based on the knowledge of educated men, travelers, missionaries, and merchants. Different geographic areas were overlaid with individual groups with their curious cultural characteristics. The environment that provided certain livelihoods and food, where specific dwellings were constructed, particular customs, habits, religions were practiced, etc., was a location of culture, tradition, and identity. In anthropological and ethnological thought, the spatial dimension has been imprinted in long-established, now anachronistic classifications of races (a legacy of medieval biblical cosmology) and the divide between *natural* and *cultural* peoples. These categorizations have had a profound impact on ethnocentrism, exoticization, stereotyping, and ultimately, racism and the justification of colonial policies.

In the Enlightenment, environmental determinism received a philosophical and scientific substantiation, derived from Montesquieu's *L'Esprit de Lois* (The Spirit of Laws, 1748), and the related concept of national character in Voltaire's *Essais sur l'histoire générale et sur les mœurs et l'esprit des nations* (Essays on General History and on the Customs and Spirit of Nations, 1756), and in the work of Johann W. Herder *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (Outlines of a Philosophie of the History of Man, 1784–1791). In constructing the *cultural other* in the 18th and even 19th century, the role of *nature* as a causal factor was not excluded. Montesquieu observed humanity in a time of societal transformation and deduced the state and its constitutional order of peoples from each human type, which he inferred from the land's climate. The forms of government and constitutional institutions or laws should correspond to nature and people and even compensate for their weaknesses. It is also important to note that in the 18th century, the term *climate* was used to refer to geographical latitude, i.e., the space between two degrees of latitude and the surrounding environment, and not just to the weather. Climate theory influenced geographical and

ethnographic thinking and state-science conceptions of *lands and people* during that period and in the 19th century (Könenkamp, 1988, pp. 27–28).

At least two Enlightenment observations have relativized the power of climate or environmental causes. The first attributed the differences between peoples to other factors (cultivation, food, education, way of life, neighborhood, etc.), i.e., to *cultural* factors, some of which are related to natural conditions, others to the refinements of culture: the higher the level of development, the lower the impact of nature; where peoples have freed themselves from the power of nature, they have remained at the stage of *natural* peoples, or in *natural conditions*. The monocausality of the environment was thus balanced by human activity (“nothing affects man like man”) and history. Human engagement with the environment gives rise to a feedback effect within the environment itself. However, it should also be interpreted as *possibilism* of environmental constraints rather than “a sweeping correlation between ecological conditions and social arrangement” or environmental constraints (Herzfeld, 2001, p. 173).

Expanding geographical knowledge has facilitated a growing knowledge and understanding of the inhabitants, their traditions, and histories. By the 18th century, geography and historiography formed a unified field of empirical knowledge, evidenced by the pre-Enlightenment labels of their focus—ancient/medieval/new history/geography, thus demonstrating the two-pronged approach of a unified science, distinct from the more speculative philosophical and theological discourses on human existence and human communities (De Waal Maljefit, 1974; Harris, 1968; Hodgen, 1964). In Europe, the historiographical-geographical interest was bound up with the imperative of acquiring knowledge about territories beyond the continent of Europe and those belonging to the major empires of the era, such as the Russian, German, and Turkish. A particular genre of describing peoples, *Völkerbeschreibung* (ethnography), pioneered by the German historian and geographer Gerhard Friedrich Müller from Göttingen University, emerged, characterized by a scientific approach: comprehensive, systematic, grounded in development theory with a comparative perspective. Furthermore, the *descriptions of peoples* brought the advent of the so-called *ethnos-sciences* (ethnography, ethnology, Ger. *Volkskunde* and *Völkerkunde*) as pre-disciplines—referred to as such because their names were not fixed nor did they have firmly defined subject matter, methods, and writing genres; they focused on ethnic groups (gens, clans, tribes, peoples, and nations). Their subject matter was initially integrated into historiography, geography, and, particularly, the nascent fields of statistics and state science (Ger. *Staatskunde*, *Staatenkunde*; Vermeulen, 2015).

The significance of Enlightenment environmentalism is corroborated in Central Europe by a substantial body of geographical, historical, and ethnographic works belonging to the *Land und Leute* (Land and People) genre, i.e., descriptions from the local to the national level. In these works, comprehensive geographical descriptions frequently introduced the characterization of the land (its size and wealth) and (the productivity of) its inhabitants. Compiled materials on ethnic groups, their territorial distribution, economy, and aspects of daily life were regarded as a valuable source of information for state administration. The same incentives—scientific and political were at work in the significant topographical campaigns in Italy, France, and the Habsburg monarchy and in producing linguistic and ethnographic maps (Johler, 2020), which required close collaboration with geographers.

The ethnos-sciences have achieved autonomy in various European countries with their institutionalization in scientific associations, journals, museums, and universities during the

latter half of the 19th century and the early 20th century, exhibiting distinct developments. In some instances, their proliferation has led to a distinction between research—mainly of folk culture and folklore conducted within the domestic and European context (ethnography) on the one hand, and research focused on non-European peoples or cultures (also known as non-European ethnology) on the other. This also implicitly addresses the concept of space as a significant factor in forming culture. Furthermore, since the last decades of the 19th century, the concept of culture has been of pivotal importance in developing the fields of anthropology and ethnology while also providing an open-ended theoretical foundation.

In the 19th century, researchers of ethnic groups outside Europe also assessed cultural development, cultural differences, and distances in space and time, albeit with different theoretical starting points. In the discourse on the spatial dimensions of culture, Friedrich Ratzel's anthropogeography occupies a distinctive position. He conceptualized a complex theory of space that could be described as an *ante-spatial turn* and anticipated the emergence of diverse (anthropo)geographical subdisciplines (cultural, human, political geography, biogeography) (Natter, 2005). However, in general, the objective was to distribute data in spatial terms (e.g., in cultural zones or cultural circles) at the descriptive level. From a theoretical standpoint, the question was whether the environment was a primary driver in the formation of culture/civilization or merely a resource that humans utilized for their survival and the advancement of civilization. The "implied indexical relationship of a cultural group and its geographic location" (Low, 2017, p. 5) or "assumed isomorphism of space, place, and culture" (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997a, p. 34) was a dominant paradigm in the majority of evolutionist, diffusionist and anthropogeographical approaches; moreover, it was most closely associated with the Edward Tylor's concept of culture(s) as internally integrated and externally (dis)separated entities that overlapped with tribe, people, or nation (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997a; Stocking, 1982). Consequently, designations such as *Samoan culture* (i.e., the culture of Samoans in Samoa) or *French culture* (the culture of the French in France) were feasible; however, today, they read like stereotypes in cheap tourist guides. The world and its perception had to become more nuanced to observe the convergence between cultures or the diverse ways of everyday life and space/place.

The second aspect of regional specialization is the theoretical insights related to the location of fieldwork: already in the past, researchers have developed several vital concepts in particular geographical areas, e.g., economic exchange in Melanesia and the Northwest of the United States of America, caste and purity in India, honor and shame in the Mediterranean (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997b), such as for example *zadruga* in the Balkan. This has led to the formation of distinct thematic and regional specializations in past and contemporary research.

### 1.2. Deconstructed culture in dispersed/fragmented/hybrid spaces

Epistemological and methodological turns can be understood as critical reflections on concepts and methods that prove inadequate for explaining or interpreting a changing world. The 20th century brought unprecedented changes on both global and local scales. *Globalization* and *glocalization*, which have strong spatial connotations, have come to be used to describe these transformations. In ethnology and anthropology, these changes gave rise to a critical examination of the concept of culture (Geertz, 1973; Hannerz, 1996; Kuper, 1999; Marcus & Fischer, 1986) and prompted a re-evaluation of methodological approaches—from fieldwork practices to writing (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Fox, 1991; Gupta &

Ferguson, 1997a). Notwithstanding the various conceptualizations of culture, including proposals to dismiss it as an overloaded concept, it remains a fundamental marker that anthropologists find challenging to navigate without (Clifford, 1988).

Globalization describes the restructuring of economies and nation-states and the rapid circulation of capital, labor, goods, people, and information (Appadurai, 1996; Inder & Rosaldo, 2008; Kearney, 1995). This process gives rise to two distinct yet interrelated phenomena: time-space compression and the formation of a blurred network of simultaneous and multifaceted ties between people and spaces. In such contexts, human agency is a driving force in social spaces (Bourdieu, 1977), where a multitude of cultural phenomena—consumerism, media, virtual spaces, migration and borders, regional and national movements, tourism, the search for authenticity, heritage, etc.—take place. These phenomena are in constant motion, spatially dispersed, and transnational (Appadurai, 1996; Hannerz, 1996). Given the processual and dynamic nature of *cultural* facts, a research methodology adapted to constant movement and change is required. *Movement* (Rapoport & Overing, 2000, pp. 261–269) has been described as “a way of being in the world”—to be in the world means to exist in time-space and its multidimensionality (additionally in Ingold, 2011a, 2011b).

Understandably, space also had to be reflected against the *natural* background of culture and human life. Various turns—one might refer to the cultural, reflexive, interpretive, affective, material, narrative, performative, and mobile turns that have shaped the postmodern ideological and academic landscape—in theoretical discourse have been instrumental, most notably the theory of practice and the spatial turn. These theoretical perspectives share a familiar premise: space, like reality in general, is socially and culturally constituted and constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In recent decades, space has been the subject of a plethora of conceptualizations, evident also in various approaches within the field of *anthropology of space and place* (e.g., social production and social construction of space, theories of gender, affect, discourse, embodiment, translocality) (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003) or studies of *spatialization of culture* (Low, 2017) that had deeply informed ethnographic research.

In the philosophical tradition, there are two fundamental conceptions: *space* as an absolute and objective concept that allows for the position of bodies, and *space* as a relative concept that exists only with time, experiences, thoughts, objects, and events. Conversely, the idea of *place* is of primary importance: in the phenomenological tradition—exemplified particularly by Edmund Husserl’s work, it is regarded as the fundamental locus of human existence, the primary experiential setting, and the locus of everyday life.

The thought-provoking insights of Pierre Bourdieu and Henri Lefebvre are integrated into philosophy and social sciences. Bourdieu’s theory of practice and habitus emphasized the role of human agency and introduced the human body into spatial practices (Bourdieu, 1977). This highlighted a set of bodily techniques (previously identified by Marcel Mauss) and tactics (as described by Michel de Certeau) that transformed the field of anthropology. Lefebvre’s conceptualization of space informs his dialectical model for the analysis and interpretation of space as a triad of *spatial practices, representations of space, and representational spaces* (Lefebvre, 1974). In this sense, space is experienced, controlled, and represented. Lefebvre’s triad was reformulated by the geographer Edward Soja (1996), modeled for studying urban spaces, with spatial triadics comprising *Firstspace, Secondspace, and Thirdspace*. Firstspace creates a visible and measurable built environment that is the product of planning, policy, and urban development. Secondspace is the conceptual space as perceived by its users, influenced by

marketing strategies and expected social norms of spatial behavior; and Thirdspace is the real and imagined space in which people live and as they experience it. In it, “everything comes together [...] subjectivity and objectivity, the abstract and the concrete, the real and the imagined, the knowable and the unimaginable, the repetitive and the differential, structure, and agency, mind and body, consciousness and the unconscious, the disciplined and the transdisciplinary, everyday life and unending history” (Soya, 1996, p. 57). In addition to Lefebvre, Soja drew on Michel Foucault’s *heterotopia* and Homi Bhabha’s *hybridity* and *Thirdspace*. Soja (1989) is also credited with the spatial turn in geography, or the geographical turn, as a transdisciplinary phenomenon (Baskar, 2013). Even before Soja, the Swiss geographer Benno Werlen (1987) prioritized human action over space in social geography by proposing an action-centered approach to human geography and the geography of everyday regionalization. De Certeau (1984) focused on the use of space as a form of socio-cultural production in everyday life, distinguishing between *strategies*, which are the product of power that classifies, (de)limits, and separates spaces, and *tactics*, which people use every day to violate and resist *spatial domination*. The relationship between space and power—that is, how spatial arrangements serve as a form of political control between groups, influencing movement and exerting control over the body has been explored in numerous works by Foucault (1977). Deleuze and Guattari (1987) metaphorized resistance and rebellion to power in the figure of the nomad.

The distinction between *space* and *place* is particularly prominent in the multidisciplinary genealogy of the concept of space. Four different modalities emerge from this distinction (Low, 2017). The first position asserts that the two constructs are distinct and do not overlap. Only one is relevant in each context. While phenomenologists, social geographers, and environmental psychologists focus on the concept of *place*, Marxists, neo-Marxists, and mathematicians/geometers concentrate on the notion of *space*. The second proposal comprises two separate constructs that partially overlap and form a joint, overlapping space (e.g., translocal spaces). In the third case, *space* is broader, and *place* is a narrower concept, i.e., a lived space that is created and phenomenologically experienced through daily spatial practices (e.g., the space of home); this distinction is mainly adopted in anthropology. The fourth possibility represents an inverse relationship: a broader *place* and a narrower *space*. This relationship captures aspects of *placelessness*, when the place can become an abstract space deprived of cultural intimacy (Herzfeld, 1997) and affective qualities due to ongoing global social and economic processes. Augé (1992) referred to these spaces as *non-lieux* (non-places).

The field of *anthropology of space and place* has been influenced by these considerations and the researchers’ past and contemporary research practices (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). The distinction between space and place is established in this context: *space* is more general, while *place* is a more specific, lived space. As Low (2017) outlined, the central approaches to the spatialization of culture encompass the social production and construction of space, embodied spaces, language and discourse on space, emotion, affect and space, and translocal space and places. These are material, social, symbolic, and subjective spatialized everyday practices explored in situ, considering multiple and diverse voices. This approach ultimately yields applied knowledge, for example, in the research of built space, its planning, contested spaces, migration, borders, etc. In conclusion, understanding the genealogy of conceptualizations of space/place in different disciplinary traditions is essential for orientation in the contemporary multidisciplinary field. In this field, most anthropologists and ethnologists adhere to two distinct tenets that inform their research practice.

The first characteristic is that they privilege a dynamic and fluid concept of culture. Despite the multiplicity of different perspectives and problematic emphases, “Culture in this context refers to the multiple and contingent forms of knowledge, power, and symbolism that comprise human and nonhuman interactions; material and technological processes; and cognitive processes, including thoughts, beliefs, imaginings and perceptions” (Low, 2017, p. 7). The perception of the environment and the way of being in it is a central theme in the work of anthropologist Tim Ingold (2011b). Ingold links culture, nature, and the environment into an *ecology of life*, wherein the central categories are perception, creativity, and skills as practiced and experienced in everyday life.

Another disciplinary feature is that ethnography represents a foundational methodology in anthropology/ethnology. Interpreting situated everyday practices privileges grounded theory (Low, 2017). It was noted that cultural area studies have also been theoretically productive. Even today, anthropologists adhere to them to track political and socio-cultural changes on the global map and to uncover a range of issues with local foci (e.g., regionally: East European Studies, Latin American Studies, Islamic Studies, etc.; issue-wise: spaces of poverty, migration routes, contemporary ghettoizations, polluted and climate-challenged spaces). In addition, many cultural processes and phenomena are not geographically fixed but rather mobile and require investigation across multiple locations (multi-sited ethnography). Some of these phenomena are confined to the virtual realm. This has led to a proliferation and diversification of research sites, especially *in the field*, which has long been subject to the requirement of *being there*, and is now a challenging methodological issue (Marcus, 1995; Pink et al., 2015; Podjed & Muršič, 2021; Przybylski, 2021; Rogelja Caf & Ledinek Lozej, 2023; Sheperd et al., 2018). Furthermore, considerations of multiple and flexible ways of conducting fieldwork are particularly relevant to anthropology and ethnology, compared to other academic fields employing ethnographic methods.

## 2. Culture and space/place in Slovenian ethnology

### 2.1. “Classical” culture area research in Slovenian ethnology

Research on space in Slovenian ethnology is presented from the perspective of *regional* ethnology. In the structure of discipline, ethnological scholarship in the past has separated *general* and *regional* ethnology: the former deals with historical, theoretical, and methodological issues, and the latter is devoted to the study of specific areas. The development of European ethnos-sciences since the 19th century has often been divided into research on non-European and domestic (folk) cultures. However, the latter conceptualized as ethnic—rarely overlapped with national boundaries; the term *national ethnologies* was later adopted in the vocabulary of European ethnologists, while their umbrella term was European ethnology. Within regional frameworks, thematic specializations (e.g., studies of the rural economy, vernacular architecture, food, rituals, folklore, etc.) were established, as in the classification of general ethnology and socio-cultural anthropology, which followed the so-called cultural universals. The term *regional* thus implies a territorial locus, which is not a neutral category, given the modalities of its possible essentialization.

The described relationship between environment and culture, presented in the previous chapter, has been a defining feature of Slovenian ethnology since its disciplinary beginnings at the end of the 19th century. Understanding the links between culture and space was integral to the Slovenian first ethnographic research agenda, wherein time and space were

the cardinal cultural coordinates. In the concluding section of the report on the ethnographic exhibition in Prague in 1895, Matija Murko (1896) wrote about *national culture* as a product of historical development (evolutionary flag), contacts between cultures (diffusionism or migration of cultural goods) and specific characteristics of nations (settlement area, language, receptive modalities of foreign cultural goods). In his research, Murko found that the construction of houses did not correspond to linguistic boundaries, which were the primary criterion of ethnic boundaries at the time. He discussed the more widespread regional cultural characteristics linked to the fact that the Slovenian territory is the crossroads of the Alpine, Mediterranean, and Pannonian areas—not only geographically but also culturally. Murko noted that cultural boundaries do not follow ethnic (national) boundaries but rather spatial ones. This formed the basis for culture area research, which remained a dominant approach in Slovenian (and also European) ethnology as long as its central subject was folk culture. In particular, the diffusionist approach (migration of cultures, cross-cultural contacts) led to the dismantling of the supposedly unified culture, which was to overlap with the ethnic/national group (Slavec Gradišnik, 2001).

The majority of ethnologically significant contributions in the first half of the 20th century adopted Murko's conclusion that the Slovenian territory is a juncture of three geographical areas and a culturally mixed central Slovenian region; in this respect, Slovenia is a "Europe in miniature" (Kuret, 1984, p. 483). Furthermore, each of these regions is also marked by its distinct historical trajectories. Researchers who conducted field research and pursued typological studies of cultural phenomena (e.g., vernacular architecture, folk art, folk music) also underscored the regional ethnopsychological character. Similar was the case in the anthropogeographical research of Franjo Baš; he was persuaded that rural culture was molded by the landscape, most conspicuous in economic practices and vernacular architecture, but also the *psyche of the population*. Baš believed that all cultural phenomena serve as "a means of ascertaining the folk-characterological traits" (Baš, 1965, p. 292). Despite lacking ethnological training (philologists, art historians, historians, and geographers), the researchers mentioned above were adept fieldworkers, conducting research in localities, which is a fundamental feature of ethnography. The method transformed the object of study. This was corroborated by vernacular architecture research by geographer Anton Melik (1935–1936). In the works of Baš and Melik traces of Jovan Cvijić's anthropogeography can be recognized (Slavec Gradišnik, 2016).

In the introduction to the first comprehensive overview of the ethnography of the Slovenians (Ložar, 1944), cultural areas were not explicitly addressed. However, they were considered in individual chapters authored by multiple experts. The author referenced the spatial aspect when enumerating the auxiliary disciplines of ethnography. Geography is a valuable tool for research in areas "where the remains of folk culture are closely linked to nature, which is particularly evident in settlements, housing, and economy. The shape of the land surface and climatic conditions influence the formation of settlements. At the same time, the geographical structure of a territory determines the availability of materials for construction and the production of tools. [...] The economy is shaped by natural conditions in a distinctive manner" (Ložar, 1944, p. 19). Anthropogeography is the study of the influence of nature "on man and his life and vice versa". In many respects, the ethnographer's work coincides with the anthropogeographer's. However, he postulated a notable difference in their approaches: ethnography is a historical science, whereas anthropogeography is a descriptive one. The ethnographer has also benefited from the geographic cartographic



method, which has recently been used extensively in ethnography. This method enables us to explain and illustrate many things that should otherwise remain unexplained (Ložar, 1944).

In the aftermath of World War II, the study of *images of regions* (Slavec Gradišnik, 2001) continued to be a prominent area of research. Many regionally oriented studies were published, and typological research plans also classified cultural elements according to regional scale or *ethnographic areas*. Vilko Novak (1958) addressed this topic in his analysis of the structure of Slovenian folk culture. His objective was to present the structure of Slovenian folk culture (historically conceived) in its principal elements, in its genetic and geographical origin and development. Novak's interest was in the time-space continuum of folk culture; he defined specific spatial formations in *cultural or ethnological areas* (areals, regions), which are "culturally and linguistically transient, but also historically and politically linked in the historical lands." Geographical location has, therefore, had a decisive influence on the "ethnic formation of folk culture." Novak referred to the "geographic-ethnic character of regions" and "the ethnic character of smaller units", which means that he did not identify the ethnic with the national (Novak, 1958, pp. 24–26). An example of this paradigm is the group of researchers from the Alpine countries (Slovenia, Austria, Italy, Switzerland, and Germany) who became known through meetings and publications under the name *Alpes Orientales* (1956–1975). They promoted the comparative study of ancient cultural roots—traditions of folk poetry, customs, beliefs, medicine, the remnants of the old ethnic substrate, pastoral culture, and life—in an ethnically diverse (at the intersection of the Slavic, Germanic, and Romance worlds) but historically, geographically, and culturally interconnected Eastern Alpine world.

The importance Novak attached to space is exemplified in his discussion of the unified method in ethnology with four directions (geographical, historical-philological, psychological, and sociological) (Novak, 1956, pp. 13–15). He specifically referenced the geographic-cartographic method and the use of ethnological atlases. The cartographic method and technique illustrate the distinctive classifications of cultural phenomena in space, facilitate their categorization according to origin and migration patterns, and gain insight into the formation of ethnic groups. Atlases, in turn, represent the cultural elements of various peoples, their shared and distinctive cultural characteristics, and the transmission of these elements from one population to another.

The initiative to create a European ethnological atlas (EEA) in the 1950s, which an international commission organized under the leadership of the Croatian ethnologist Branimir Bratanić, is worth mentioning. In socialist Yugoslavia, the collection of material for the Ethnological Atlas of Yugoslavia (EAY) was carried out under the auspices of the Ethnological Society of Yugoslavia, with varying intensity in the republics of former Yugoslavia. A volume of maps was published in Zagreb, where all the collected material is kept (Belaj et al., 1989). It should be added here that *ethnological cartography* was derived from historical cultural-spatial research and not from geography; they were linked only by the representation technique of spatial distribution. With modern digital applications (e.g., GIS), it takes on different contours (Brozović Rončević & Štokov, 2017). The EAY (and the EEA) remained unfinished desiderata for several reasons. From a disciplinary standpoint, it is noteworthy that these activities occurred during disciplinary shifts in ethnology in Europe and the former Yugoslavia. This period saw transformations in theoretical and methodological orientation from cultural-historical to functionalist, structuralist, and critical-historical approaches. This does not imply that the material collected for the atlas lacks merit; however, it necessitates a critical methodological analysis and evaluation for future

use. The major shortcoming is the primary focus on cultural elements per se, without considering the broader social context in which they are embedded. This is also a hallmark and the crucial point of criticism of the traditional cultural-historical ethnographic paradigm.

In the initial decades of the second half of the 20th century, when researchers aimed primarily at filling in the white gaps in Slovenian ethnography and, to a certain extent, also at *salvage* ethnography, theoretical thought was relatively neglected. This was also why one could not expect in-depth reflections on spatialized culture. Still, it was based on spatial determinants that Novak was referring to as *cultural* or *ethnic areas*, which comprise “a territory with the same or similar cultural elements, the same way of life” (Novak, 1960, p. 21). The use of the adjectives *cultural*, *ethnic*, and *ethnological* to describe spatial areas tended to be unstable and blurred (Slavec Gradišnik, 2001). Research has not particularly problematized space and culture. Moreover, a cautious approach to the search for a spatial typology has moved away from cultural essentialism at the national and regional levels. Both can be attributed to the increase in ethnological attention focused on the way of life of different social groups framed in the context of socio-historical processes.

Conversely, Slovenian ethnology has kept pursuing comprehensive projects, which an emphasis on spatial considerations has predominantly characterized. In 1980, a graphic representation of the *ethnological areas* in the volume on Slovenian folk traditions was published, accompanied by the observation that they pertain to the transition from the 19th to the 20th century. The representation is based on “many common features in life and culture [...] which reflect centuries of development in the Mediterranean, Alpine, Central, and Pannonian areas”, but the boundaries between them are becoming increasingly blurred “as Slovenian material, social, and spiritual culture becomes more and more unified” (Baš, 1980, p. 19). The research project “Ethnological Topography of the Slovenian Ethnic Territory—20th Century” did not focus on ethnological or cultural regionalization. Instead, the project aimed to “document and [...] collect cultural elements from the point of view of their provenance” and to select “individual localities, smaller and limited regions, industrial settlements or urban districts” for more detailed monographic studies of the way of life (Kremenšek, 1974, pp. 189–190). Its objective was cultural differences and heterogeneity in terms of societal transformations in the time-space continuum (Slavec Gradišnik, 2000). The established modus operandi of ethnologists, that their research locus is manageable in size, was also considered. The *ethnological regionalization* of the mid-1990s was “an attempt to define individual areas of Slovenia according to their ethnological peculiarities and characteristics” (Bogataj & Hazler, 1996, p. 148). The graphic representation delineated a total of 96 units.

## 2.2. *New horizons and trajectories*

Since the 1960s, Slovenian ethnology has gradually shifted from research on folk life or folk culture to research on the *way of life* and *everyday life*. In an international comparative context, researchers engaged in reflection on its disciplinary history, identifying new research areas and methodological innovations, as well as ethnology’s relations and cooperation with other disciplines with which it shared research fields and interests, including geography (Slo. *O razmerju med geografijo in etnologijo* (About the relationship between geography and ethnology; Kremenšek, 1986)). In this debate, geographers defined the common ground at three levels: 1) the nature-society relationship, 2) the role of society in reshaping the Earth’s surface, and 3) the role of society and its civilizational or cultural stage in reshaping

landscapes or regions. In the past, the intersections have been most prominent in research on vernacular architecture, rural settlements, and rural economy, as well as on rural geography, historical-geographical research, and, more recently, on national and ethnic processes among Slovenian minorities and among Slovenian emigrants around the world. Research has been emphasized within clearly delineated regional contexts, particularly in monument conservation (material heritage in space). Geographers and ethnologists have recognized that the distinction between *nature* and *culture* is as sharp as the individual disciplines emphasize it. Furthermore, they have identified that Slovenian humanities and social sciences have taken “nature” and “environment” for granted without adequately reflecting upon these concepts. This means that “spatial thinking is possible without an explicit concept of space” (Baskar, 2013, p. 27).

It has been nearly four decades since these reflections were presented. In addition to the shifts already mentioned in the previous chapter, there has been a flourishing dialogue between ethnologists and anthropologists in Slovenia, as in several national ethnologies across Europe since the end of the 1980s. The impetus for the appeal of anthropology was dissatisfaction with ethnological theory and practice. According to critics, three shortcomings were identified: 1) a regional approach (focus on national ethnology) rather than a thematic one, 2) a comparative and holistic approach was lacking, and 3) research on social groups rather than individuals was favored. The conceptual and methodological challenges pertained to the thematization of opposites, including regional-thematic, national-comparative, collective-individual, particularistic-holistic, inductive-deductive, and ethic-emic (Jezernik, 1991; Šmitek, 1991). Many of them implicitly postulated the relevance of also discussing the concept of space; e.g., the *local*, *regional*, and *national* are identifications people perceive as relevant, not *a priori*, but when these are perceived or experienced as appropriate in certain circumstances (or situationally) or, more explicitly, attached, for example, to vernacular language, local heritage, or landscape.

The *Bulletin of the Slovene Ethnological Society* (46/3–4) published a thematic issue on the anthropology of space in 2006. With regard to the concept of the *spatial turn*, the introductory article highlighted the increasing dispersion of space within the global cultural economy, a phenomenon with two radical paradigmatic implications: the first concerns the dispersed locations of fieldwork, while the second refers to the notion that “human space [...] is a construct of human activities and ideas” (or agency), including participatory or bodily agency (Muršič, 2006, p. 48). The author was critical of previous ethnological practices that relied on diffusionism, historicism, ethnographic positivism, or realism, or were comfortable with cartography and established geographical concepts. Instead, “social spatialization in everyday life” was given priority over concrete spatial units (landscape, area, place, site, location). In terms of agency and movement, spatialization is one of the practices—alongside embodiment, socialization, and identification that constitute productive starting points for exploring multiple dimensions of the spatial turn. Other papers illustrated aspects of the spatial turn through the interpretation of nature in national parks, the production of space in youth cultural centers, imaginary geographies in tourism, the social and physical space of the home, and the space of cinema.

A review of the inspirational character of the spatial turn over the last two decades would necessitate a separate, in-depth analysis. However, in the context of the debate on the relationship between cultural processes and practices of everyday life and spaces, places, and the environment in which they occur, it is evident that no ethnological or anthropological

issue escapes the spatial framework. A cursory examination of the titles and subtitles of books and journal articles reveals that most research topics are territorially defined. This fact needs a brief comment: It seems that researchers, regardless of the topic under study, consider localization as a necessary framework or background, albeit with different implications. On the one hand, it is standard for the issues to be defined in space. This is as true for studying subsistence economies as it is for analyzing contemporary performative folklore—cultural phenomena always *take place*. This is particularly common when research concerns locally or regionally specific cultural phenomena and processes or focuses on local or regional identity.

On the other hand, in recent decades, the actual focus may be on emplacement as experienced and perceived by the actors. Researchers have situated space at the core of their research, conceptualizing it as a site of diverse forms of action and differentiation. This is exemplified by a selected list of research projects that focus on spaces and places, including state borders and cultural boundaries in Southeast Europe; the comparative analysis of construction and redefinition of spatial concepts in processes of integration of Slovenia into supranational frameworks; the role of new festivals in the production of locality; heritage in the Triglav National Park; protected areas along the Slovenian-Hungarian border, urban spaces and their futures in Croatia and Slovenia, and isolated communities in Slovenia and Croatia; anthropology of the senses; digital technologies. The highlights of the projects are different—political borders, border areas, historical and contemporary migrations, economy, sustainability, landscape, ecology, traffic, communication, protected areas, heritage, memorial centers, mythical landscapes, sacred spaces, emplaced folklore, homeland, emotions, senses, memory, embodiment, transnational space and places, urban spaces, tourist places, virtual spaces, isolated places, pandemic, inclusion and exclusion, but they show that space is a fundamental organizing principle and experiential category in individual and community life.

These changes also require new research methods. In addition to the aforementioned multi-site ethnography, implemented especially when the comparative focus is on phenomena with global dimensions, this also includes virtual and/or digital ethnography, which at the same time marks the space of new phenomena (e.g., social and other online networks) and methods (Muršič, 2019; Podjed & Muršič, 2021). Research interests that capture the experience of space by actors and researchers who are themselves actors and interpret their experiences as part of the research (auto-ethnography, Podjed, 2020; anthropology of senses, Bajič, 2020) develop various forms of participatory research—both remote and direct, e.g., by walking (Abram & Bajič, 2022; Bajič & Abram, 2019; Rogelja Caf & Ledinek Lozej, 2023). Hybrid methods (e.g., armchair, remote and field research, field and virtual ethnography) have shown their potential utility, e.g., during the COVID-19 pandemic (Podjed, 2021, 2024), when lockdowns that changed the taken-for-granted places of everyday life prevented researchers from entering their real physical terrain and forced them to think about how to redefine the field in crises in new and appropriate ways.

### 3. Conclusion

The enduring interest in the spatialization of cultures, the intricate interplay between humans, their cultures, and space, is deeply rooted in our primary experience and categorization of the world based on the proximity and distance between *us-here* and *them-there*. The assumption that human communities cannot be conceptualized without spatial coordinates is an inherent

aspect of the geographical and ethnological horizon. It has long been taken for granted and unreflected upon, underscoring the historical significance of cultural spatialization.

Following the traveling *knowledge* of proto-geographical determinism from Antiquity, the scientific basis of environmental determinism was established during the Enlightenment. The role of *nature* or *environment* was central as a formative factor in the recognition and simultaneous construction of the cultural *other* alongside the importance of history. The isomorphism of peoples, space, and cultures in the 19th century was a central tenet of evolutionary, diffusionist, and anthropogeographical approaches; these approaches have since been most closely associated with the descriptive concept of culture.

The 20th century was a time of unprecedented change at the global and local levels, marked by the highly spatialized terms of *globalization* and *glocalization*. In anthropology, these developments led to a series of critical deconstructions. The most significant concerned the concept of culture and research methodology that embraces the link between the *what* and the *how*. In classical vocabulary, the method follows the questions (the object of research). In contemporary epistemology, however, the problem (the *what*) and the methodology (the *how*) are inseparable; they are one.

For researchers, the challenge lies in the spatio-temporal compression and the emergence of complex, often blurred networks of connections between people and spaces created by human agency. The spaces of life are constituted by a multitude of mobile, geographically and socially dispersed, and transnational cultural phenomena. The concept of space required a reconsideration that extended beyond the conventional boundaries of culture's *natural* setting. Among the numerous postmodern turns, the most influential for this topic were the practical and spatial turns that conceived space as socially and culturally constituted and constructed. In the new conceptualizations of space, in addition to its *objective* existence, space is a site of agency, i.e., of (re)production, (re)representation, and experience, including embodiment. These categories are of central importance for theory and research in the anthropology of space and place or the spatialization of culture, highlighting the contemporary relevance of the spatial turn.

In Slovenia, the relationship between culture and environment was incorporated into the beginnings of the development of ethnology as a type of regional ethnology at the end of the 19th century. Murko noted that cultural and ethnic boundaries do not converge. Cultural characteristics of the Slovenian territory—a crossroads of the Alpine, Mediterranean, and Pannonian worlds transcend ethnic boundaries. Until the second half of the 20th century, this was the basis of cultural area research (i.e., comparative and typological studies of cultural elements using cultural-historical and cultural-geographical methods), which was the predominant approach in European and Slovenian ethnology as long as its central object was folk culture. This paradigm is characterized by two features: images of folk culture were primarily characterized by regional differences and ethnologists thought of space without an explicit concept of place.

This paradigm was dismantled with the shift of interest to lifestyles and everyday life. With a time lag, the spatial turn was introduced in Slovenia after 2000. In the debates on the relationship between cultural processes, everyday practices, and the spaces and places where they occur, it is evident that no research question escapes the spatial framework. Regardless of the topic under study, localization is a necessary or primary frame, albeit with different implications: it can be taken for granted that topics are defined in space or focus

on emplacement and embodiment as experienced and perceived by actors. Space is, therefore, a research window: it is a fundamental organizing principle and experiential category in the lives of individuals and communities, as well as the site of action and multiple practices of differentiation. This is also confirmed by the various European regional project schemes (e.g., Interreg Europe—Alpine Space, Central Europe, Danube Space, Balkan-Mediterranean, etc.) in which Slovenian researchers have been intensively involved in the last decade. It seems reasonable to assume that the rationale behind this regionalization of research is not merely administrative in nature; instead, it is likely to have an underlying “cultural logic” that deserves further investigation.

In Slovenia, the number of ethnologists and anthropologists involved in both basic and applied research is on the rise; researchers are highly engaged in the international circulation of knowledge; and there is a proliferation of research specializations. Concurrently, the aforementioned paradigmatic shifts are mutually reinforcing in novel and distinct ways. New theoretical approaches are discernible in the research agendas of scholars engaged with various topics, many of which may initially appear peripheral to the focal spatial perspective. In contrast, others are explicitly involved in reflecting the nuances of the spatial foci in everyday and critical circumstances, caused, for example, by health and war circumstances or ecological threats and natural disasters (Peternel & Podjed, 2024; Podjed, 2024).

In conclusion, as Max Weber observed, “all knowledge of cultural reality is always knowledge from a particular point of view.” As a *tópoi*, the spatial turn has provided new perspectives on puzzling liaisons and has also contributed to our understanding of the structure and dynamics of academic landscapes and communities. In addition to their particular historical trajectories, they also have their geographies.

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