

Cross-border identity as a daily resistance tactic in a time of global health emergency: Gorizia-Nova Gorica go borderless

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ABSTRACT

Ulrich Beck represented risk society as the overcoming of the nation states as the container of the respective civil societies. The social contract which was at the base of the construction of what Anderson defined the imagined communities, sanctioned the renunciation by the populations of part of their prerogatives of freedom in favour of the security guaranteed by the sovereign power. The present global health emergency seems to have proposed the same social pact: more security and less freedom especially of movement of people segregated within the apparently resurging nation states by new borders and walls. The remaining residue of globalisation is its economic-financial globalism. Yet ethnographic analysis along border areas reveals a consolidated cross-border identity experienced in people's everyday life as a tactic of resistance against the erection of new self-containment barriers. This contribution aims to analyse the salient aspects of this phenomenon in the city of Gorizia, which for decades has constituted an integrated metropolitan area of the Italian and Slovenian zones, defining a specific cross-border identity shared by both Italian and Slovenian citizens. This identity has not given way in front of the walls that have been restored in recent months in order to contain the contagion and therefore could represent what de Certeau defined as a tactic of resistance that in the present case bears witness to the invention of an increasingly cosmopolitan daily life.

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Ulrich Beck defined risk society as that which supersedes nation states as container of their respective civil societies (Beck, 1992). In order to understand this profound change, sociology itself appears inadequate, populated as it is by definitions that Beck considers to be *zombie* concepts: '«the conceptual apparatus of the sociology of modernity appears in crisis because it is inadequate to describe the situation of society in which the borders of nation states that encompassed them have dissolved in an extremely rapid period of time. Rather than a definitive departure from that sociology, Beck's invitation to the international community of sociologists was to recalibrate their concepts towards a cosmopolitan perspective» (Porcelli, 2005, p. 8). This essay attempts to respond to Beck's suggestion. Bringing *zombie* concepts back to life is no mean feat. Starting from Anderson's theory of imagined communities, an attempt will be made to propose a

number of analytical models suitable for grasping the dynamics of the transformations that characterise risk society. The social contract which was the basis of the construction of what Anderson defined the imagined communities, sanctioned the renunciation by the populations of some of their prerogatives of freedom in favour of the security guaranteed by the sovereign power. The present global health emergency seems to have proposed the same social pact: more security and less freedom especially of movement of people segregated within the apparently resurging nation states by new borders and walls. The residue of globalisation is its economic-financial dimension. In addition to Anderson's theory, particular attention will be devoted to de Certeau's sociology of everyday life. This paradigm proposes the original keystone for the description of the emergence of a cross-border identity in a time of change. Cross-border identity within the frame of risk society cannot exist separately from the practices of everyday life. Ethnographic analysis along border areas reveals a consolidated cross-border identity experienced in people's everyday life as a tactic of resistance against the erection of new self-containment barriers. This contribution aims to analyse the salient aspects of this phenomenon in the city/town of Gorizia, which for decades has constituted an integrated metropolitan area of the Italian and Slovenian zones, defining a specific cross-border identity shared by both Italian and Slovenian citizens. This identity has held sway despite the walls that have been restored in recent months in order to contain the contagion and therefore could represent what de Certeau defined as a tactic of resistance that in the present case bears witness to the invention of an increasingly cross-border daily life. In this respect, the main points of the 'project book' submitted for the candidacy of Gorizia-Nova Gorica as European Capital of Culture 2025 will be examined and constitute our case study. The title itself of the bidbook specifies the emergence of the cross-border identity of the area under analysis: 'Go borderless'. This document represents an ideal first-order observation that is the self-description of the daily practices of the Gorizia cross-border community. In Luhmann's perspective, a theory of society should mean nowadays a sociology that reclaims its function as a description of descriptions, a second-order observation with respect to the material offered by the self-descriptions made by social systems. The present contribution will try to move in line with Luhmann's directions (Luhmann, 2013, p. 342). The theme of cross-border identity will be addressed from the perspective of a second-order observer as an alternative to hermeneutic approaches (in the sense of interpretation of first-order observations made by the committee in charge of the compilation of the 'Go borderless' project book).

1. Gorizia and the myth of mitteleurope: between past and future

Gorizia, today a border town, was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918. The cultural identity was then that of Central Europe, an imagined community of peoples, languages and religions, an experience of multi-ethnicity more experienced than searched for. Gorizia-Görz-Gorica was designated with three different names, similarly to the other cities of the empire. The names corresponded to the languages spoken. The German name, which was the official language of political and economic power, was never much loved. In addition to German, there were two other names that corresponded to the ethnic majorities and minorities of the population that in 1913 in Gorizia were represented by the Slovenian and Italian components. The cards were

inevitably shuffled at the end of the First World War and even more radically after the Second World War. Until 1945 Gorizia was not a border town. During the golden age of the Hapsburg Empire, the small town of Gorizia was celebrated as the ideal place of residence for the retired officials of the imperial bureaucracy, which Musil ironically called Kakania (Musil, 1996). At the same time, however, it occupied a very special position for the Slovenian ethnic group. Slovenians did not participate in the nineteenth century resurgence of the imagined communities of Central Europe. They remained loyal citizens of the Empire, which protected their linguistic and cultural identity. The most important urban centres for the Slovenes were then Leibach-Ljubljana, Marburg-Maribor and Görz-Gorica. Ljubljana was the economic and commercial centre, while Gorizia was their small cultural capital for the Slovenes. Gorizia then found itself embodying the myth of Central European culture imbued with all its ambiguities. As the narrative of *Mitteleuropa* has highlighted, that culture was at the same time pushing towards the future of modernity and looking towards the past that characterised its inertia. New and old shared the same spaces, though not without conflict. As far as the border identity of Gorizia was concerned, there was the silent yet politically involved presence of the Italian minority, and in that minority especially significant was the presence of those elements who were part of the 'irredentist movement'. The border line until 1918 separated the territory of Gorizia from the Italian state. The geopolitical characteristics of that time do not allow the historian to speak about a border identity, since Gorizia was the cultural capital of the Slovenian ethnic group that did not experience the condition of the border.

What happened from November 1918 was a very different story for Gorizia, together with Trieste and Trento. The German-speaking imperial component made up of civil and military bureaucracy abandoned the territories that were occupied by the Italian army in expectation that the annexation would become official. For Italian Gorizia, this meant in the short term a reshuffling of the ethnic components. The place left free by the German-speaking officials of the empire and their families was soon occupied by the civil and military officials of the Kingdom of Italy, often coming from the centre and the south of the peninsula. What had been a minority until 1918 all of a sudden became a majority while the Slovenian majority became a minority and Gorizia, their cultural capital, lost its privileged status. The twenty years of Fascism exasperated the Italianization of the territory by imposing Italian as the official language, the learning of which was compulsory from primary school onwards also for Slovenians (Vinci, 2011). It was true that a kingdom of Yugoslavia had been constituted but it was a political artifice to place those ethnic components that found no place in other national states that had arisen from the irredentism of the imagined communities of the nineteenth century. For all these reasons we believe that the concept of Anderson's Imagined Communities (2006) is crucial to our analysis:

«Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* was published in 1983, giving a breath of fresh air to a discussion of nationalism that hadn't seen any really major new ideas in at least a generation. Analysis was mired in old debates over primordial identities vs invented traditions, nationalism as cultural inheritance vs reflection of modern statemaking, mere false consciousness vs powerful political factors. To the extent that each of these dichotomies posed a forced choice, Anderson took the side of the second. But more powerfully, Anderson subverted the dichotomies themselves, asking why newly made traditions should feel primordial, how

modern statemaking was able to produce a world in which cultural identities seemed powerful enough to be killed or kill for, and how constructed identities both rested on political economy and shaped social relations». (Calhoun, 2016)

Anderson's analysis poses a major intellectual challenge. The collective memory of the imagined communities is not simply a symbolic fact. The process of nation-building in nineteenth-century Central and Eastern Europe institutionalised national languages from dialects spoken by the humbler classes of the population into written languages, giving rise to literary and artistic movements to support the construction of the respective national identities. This was mostly a project carried out by the intellectual classes. Imagined communities gradually turned into living communities inhabiting territories, and border lines began to be drawn to keep out, or to expel, those who did not recognise themselves in the emerging national identities. Collective memory is unfortunately often also the memory of bloodshed in the wars that followed. Imagined communities have been and perhaps still are in many contexts a divisive factor.

«A prominent translator, Gorizia born Ervino Pocar once said: 'Only in Gorizia can a Slovenian professor teach French in German to Italian students.' Where have all those professors gone? Where are the students that a hundred years ago ran through the corridors of the famous Gorizia Staatsgymnasium, laughing and joking in four languages?»¹

This lucid observation describes, not without bitterness, the history that marked the events in Gorizia at least until the fall of the Berlin Wall. At the end of the Second World War the city found itself divided by the Iron Curtain described by Churchill in his speech at Fulton in Missouri on 5 March 1946:

«From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the Continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of Central and Eastern Europe. Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia, all these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere, and all are subject in one form or another, not only to Soviet influence but to a very high and, in many cases, increasing measure of control from Moscow».²

Beyond the curtain lay Tito's Yugoslavia, which aligned itself with the Moscow blockade despite Marshal's distinction in order to guarantee itself a living space between the satellite countries. Gorizia ceased to be the multi-ethnic city described by Ervino Pocar.

2. Gorizia and the border

Nova Gorica was founded in 1948, when, following the peace treaties after the Second World War, the border divided the city of Gorizia in two and the eastern part of the city was assigned to Yugoslavia. Tito then decided to lay the first stone of a new urban settlement. He did not do so where the border divided Italian Gorizia from the small part of the town that became Yugoslavia within the federal republic of Slovenia. Nova Gorica was built on the other side of the Castagnevizza hill in the open countryside. The choice was not accidental. Nova Gorica would have represented an independent urban entity, inhabited by the Slovenian ethnic group that belonged to the new Yugoslavia of Tito. In this way an Italian Gorizia on one side of the Iron Curtain and a New Yugoslav Gorizia on the other side would lie opposite each other. The logic of division would be more successful compared to the logic of

cooperation. In everyday life all this had dramatic repercussions on the existence of the citizens who had lived together peacefully for centuries despite the different languages and cultures. Cutting through families where grandparents could not see their grandchildren grow up, cutting through stables where cows ate in Italy and slept in Yugoslavia, cutting off the living from the dead where the city was on one side and the cemetery on the other».³ Suddenly citizens were separated by geopolitical choices, which meant that the Slovenian ethnic group in particular had to choose which side they were on. Many decided to be the co-founders of what the Tito regime's propaganda celebrated as their city. Among them was my grandmother. Others stayed in Italy not without the difficulty of undergoing a policy of cultural assimilation. Conversely the construction of the Slovenian historical narrative on the border area is different, mainly centred on Gorizia as a lost city. Gorizia was reunited with the territories divided by the Treaty of Rapallo and became Slovenian on 1st May 1945. The end of the war is celebrated as a double liberation, both from the German occupation and from the Italian authorities before the Nazi government. The struggle for dominance over the territory of Venezia Giulia was much more complex. On 1st May 1945 Yugoslav troops entered Trieste, Monfalcone and Gorizia, where they were met by the allied troops who entered the city the following day. Thus began the period of the double military occupation and the disputed administration of the 'liberated' lands. The dispute was resolved on 12 June 1945 with the Treaty of Duino, which divided Venezia Giulia into two areas subject to military occupation administration: zone A, called Anglo-American (AMG) and zone B, administered by the Yugoslav Army. The city of Gorizia passed to the Allied Government (AMG) and the Yugoslav Army had to withdraw from the occupied/liberated areas. The part of the population that for national or ideological reasons welcomed the Yugoslav troops as winners and liberators, at the time of their departure in June 1945, showed their dissatisfaction by demonstrating in the streets of the city. Two years later, with the signing of the Peace Treaty, the city of Gorizia was definitively given to Italy. The Slovenian population, which had always resisted oppression and assimilation by fighting for its national identity, will remember until today the events of 1945 as the 'loss' of Gorizia. Crossing the state border of the so called Red House (Rožna Dolina) checkpoint was not an easy task even for relatives. The checkpoint controls, at least in the early years, were not dissimilar from those to which the Berliners were subjected to cross Checkpoint Charlie. The comparison with the Berlin wall is not ephemeral since the first wall was erected in 1947 in Gorizia while the most famous one was built only in 1961. The expression Gorizia Wall (in Slovenian Goriški zid) was used in the press to describe a fence consisting of a 50 cm wide concrete base surmounted by a 1.5 metre railing built in 1947 and located along the Italian-Yugoslavian border passing through the city of Gorizia. The wall separated the remaining Italian town of Gorizia from the suburbs and the railway station of the Transalpina railway, which were annexed to Yugoslavia at the end of the Second World War (Širok, 2016, pp. 125–126).

3. Gorizia beyond the border: cross-border identity and everyday life

In 2004, following Slovenia's entry into the European Union, the portion that divided the Transalpina into two squares was dismantled. The very same spot, the barbed wire

playground, in 2004 was chosen by the European Commission to celebrate the enlargement of the European Union. The Mayors of Nova Gorica and Gorizia had removed the fence months earlier. People celebrated by passing a giant red ball over the disappearing border. Today citizens walk across the square freely. There is no visible sign of separation and the border stone that once divided the two cities is encircled by a mosaic, the work of a local artist». ⁴ This started a slow process of cross-border policies in which the two entities that looked at each other from afar, not without mistrust, began to collaborate and build networks. The border ceased to be a barrier and became a threshold of the Transalpina square, which is in effect an invisible border. The distracted tourist would be attracted by the presence of an oval in the road surface that reminded him of an apparently remote history of the barrier that no longer existed. History, however, is bizarre and tends to repeat itself. The recent crisis of the Covid-19 during the month of March 2020 suddenly restored the borders and the Transalpina square found itself again divided in two by a barrier of concrete and barbed wire. What happened during those three months, from March to June, despite the tragedy was a powerful beacon of hope. The media broadcast the touching images of families who, unable to celebrate their birthdays together, passed gifts from one side of the wall to the other, their eyes full of tears. When the borders were reopened in mid-June 2020, there was a celebration of a whole people. Cross-border identity could be defined as a convergent culture. Henry Jenkins has called convergence culture the collision between the top-down and bottom-up cultural dimension (Jenkins, 2006, p. 4). In order to achieve the constitution of a new cultural identity, geopolitical projects are not enough if at the same time a culture of everyday life is not developed. Gorizia-Nova Gorica is a tangible example of such a cultural convergence. It is a question of examining the stages of what Michel de Certeau called the practice of everyday life (1986) ⁵:

«A distinction between strategies and tactics appears to provide a more adequate initial scheme. I call a strategy the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated. It postulates a place that can be delimited as its own and serve as the base from which relations with an exteriority composed of targets or threats (customers or competitors, enemies, the country surrounding the city, objectives and objects of research, etc.) can be managed. As in management, every 'strategic' rationalisation seeks first of all to distinguish its 'own' place, that is, the place of its own power and will, from an 'environment.' A Cartesian attitude, if you wish: it is an effort to delimit one's own place in a world bewitched by the invisible powers of the Other. It is also the typical attitude of modern science, politics, and military strategy». (De Certeau, 1984, pp. 35–36)

The practice of everyday life has its deep roots in what de Certeau called as tactics:

«By contrast with a strategy (whose successive shapes introduce a certain play into this formal scheme and whose link with a particular historical configuration of rationality should also be clarified), a tactic is a calculated action determined by the absence of a proper locus. No delimitation of an exteriority, then, provides it with the condition necessary for autonomy. The space of a tactic is the space of the other. Thus it must play on and with a terrain imposed on it and organised by the law of a foreign power. It does not have the means to keep to itself, at a distance, in a position of withdrawal, foresight, and self-collection: it is a maneuver 'within the enemy's field of vision,' as von Billow put it, and within enemy territory. It does not, therefore, have the options of planning general strategy and viewing the adversary as a whole within a district, visible, and objectifiable space. It operates in isolated actions, blow

by blow. It takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its own position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment. It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers. It poaches in them. It creates surprises in them. It can be where it is least expected. It is a guileful ruse. In short, a tactic is an art of the weak». (De Certeau, 1984, pp. 36–37)

De Certeau supports the sociological perspective that Jenkins would later apply to the world of digital media. The concept of convergence culture is a development of dichotomy strategy-tactics. Jenkins aims to emphasise the centrality that the UGC (User Generated Contents) have assumed in the new media environment. Digital communication is made of grassroots content, generated from below, produced by the user. The user is often a content poacher, i.e. he reworks in a unique and original way the messages transmitted by the traditional broadcast media. What happens in the new media domain is a convergence between top-down contents broadcast by traditional communication professionals and user-generated bottom-up content. Such content, this must be strongly reiterated, is solicited by the messages coming from the cultural industry. Users take possession of these messages in order to mix them, plunder them, redefine them and consequently produce new and original cultural objects. The application of de Certeau's theory elaborated by Jenkins is limited to the context of digital media. The dichotomy of strategies and tactics can spread much wider. This was probably the idea that de Certeau had already expressed in the title of *The practice of everyday life*. Tactics are declined/defined in the context of everyday life. In continuity with the lesson of Pierre Bourdieu and his concept of human practical action, de Certeau thought of tactics as daily recipes for resistance to the strategies produced by the apparatuses of power. The pages that Bourdieu devoted in his anthropological studies to Kabylia culture in Algeria often dwelt on the humble operations carried out by farmers in their daily lives (Bourdieu, 1990). Culinary practices were an example of how the Kabylia culture was transmitted from one generation to the other and preserved from the assimilationist pressures of the hegemonic-dominant culture. De Certeau writes enlightening pages dedicated to the urban architecture that he considered as a planning strategy to which the tactics of exploration of the wayfarer, who invents his own paths regardless of maps, responds. However, the tactics of participatory culture need to be put into practice in everyday life to become familiar. Meanwhile the traditional power strategies of the nation states will continue to exert their influence. As Jenkins writes in the closing pages of his book: «convergence culture is enabling new forms of participation and collaboration. For Levy, the power to participate within knowledge communities exists alongside the power the nation-state exerts over its citizens and corporations within commodity capitalism exert over its workers and consumers. For Lévy, at his most Utopian, this emerging power to participate serves as a strong corrective to those traditional sources of power, though they will also seek ways to turn it toward their own ends. We are just learning how to exercise that power – individually and collectively – and we are still fighting to define the terms under which we will be allowed to participate. Many fear this power; others embrace it. There are no guarantees that we will use our new power any more responsibly than nation-states or corporations have exercised theirs. We are trying to

hammer out the ethical codes and social contracts that will determine how we will relate to one another just as we are trying to determine how this power will insert itself into the entertainment system or into the political process. Part of what we must do is figure out how – and why – groups with different backgrounds, agendas, perspectives, and knowledge can listen to one another and work together toward the common good. We have a lot to learn» (Jenkins, 2006, pp. 245–246).

4. A call to a borderless identity

The collapse of the Berlin Wall threw the Eastern block countries into crisis. The crisis exploded with extreme violence in post-Tito Yugoslavia. The federal republics that had constituted it claimed their independence from the central power in Belgrade. These were the years of the former-Yugoslavia war that would crush Marshal's utopia to ashes. Nova Gorica in this war represented a strategic point being located on the border. When the republic of Slovenia obtained its independence and recognition as a state entity by the international community, this was the decisive turning point for Gorica – Nova Gorica. Two forcibly divided urban entities began to interact. 2004 turned out to be the crucial year in which the wall of the Transalpina square would finally be demolished. It was a symbolic ritual that effectively sanctioned the birth of a new perspective made up of new cross-border policies. Until 2004, but also afterwards, the story we have summarised is a narrative of strategies, in the meaning that de Certeau gave to the concept of strategy. What is missing or not very evident in that period of time is the practice of the daily life of citizens. The second phase of the construction of the cross-border identity, the years from 2004 to 2020, would be crucial. The recent global crisis of Covid-19 has been for Gorizia-Nova Gorica something different from what has happened elsewhere. For many analysts the pandemic has displayed both unexpected and unpleasant implications for the supporters of the idea of a cosmopolitan society. Where borders had been demolished, new health barriers appeared in their place that were even stricter and more impermeable. Countries all over the world rediscovered their outdated feature of nation state that like hedgehogs locked themselves away to protect their health and economic interests. The territory of Gorizia-Nova Gorica responded differently. The pandemic crisis was the litmus test of a consolidated cross-border and cosmopolitan identity:

«In our flagship project EPICenter we want to erect a building, which will be half in Italy and half in Slovenia. When 70 years ago the highest authorities in Yugoslavia planned the new city Nova Gorica, they wrote they want to build something which will 'shine across the border'. We want our EPICenter to shine across many borders as a symbol of collaboration, mutual respect and cultural enrichment. And also, the starting point for an ambition, much bigger than the ECoC – to build the first European cross-border city, a transnational conurbation, a project which, if successful, can radically change the way we see Europe. Yes, it is European bureaucracy. It takes ages, it uses way too many words and excel tables. It can make a grown man cry. But it is far better than a grave with a barbed wire fence»⁶

All this leads to the hypothesis that in the period from 2004 to 2020 a repertoire of tactics decisive either to the practice of everyday life or to the resistance of the cross-border identity has been consolidated:

«The other side' is where you go for a good coffee with a dear friend, to buy a loaf of bread or a pair of jeans. The enlargement of the Union was, of course, made possible by deep structural changes throughout the continent. But people along the border overcame conflicts and hatred all by themselves, long before global political powers realised it was time for the walls to fall. Through decades of joint work in associations, cultural, educational and economic institutions and through small everyday gestures, though scarred by the horrors of war, people of Gorizia and Nova Gorica drilled a hole in the iron curtain. They managed to build a friendship, which is real, sincere and vibrant».⁷

This takes us directly to the ambitious project that with the candidacy of Gorizia-Nova Gorica as European Capital of Culture 2025 wished to break the last barrier separating the Italian and Slovenian ethnic groups, that is the spoken language.:

«This *konfin* is about challenging the tower of Babel in the land of so many languages, about all our codes of communication: body language, digital language, sign language, clown language ... The first goal, however, is to achieve a passive bilingualism between the citizens of the two cities. In a way that anyone may speak their own language and the other will understand. We strongly believe that only when we reach this level of reciprocity, we can truly create a common cultural space. With special attention toward minorities, not only the Slovenian, across the Italian border but minorities all over Europe, we will show that the mix of cultures is as much a natural state of Europe as are the national cultures/ languages».⁸

Once more the proposal is to develop inclusion projects through the social construction of reality. The sociological theory of reference is declined at the micro level. Once again it echoes the tactics of de Certeau and Bourdieu's habitus:

«I have explained the meaning and function of the concept of habitus so often that I hesitate to return to it once more, lest I only repeat myself and simplify without necessarily clarifying things. All I want to say here is that the main purpose of this notion is to break with the intellectualist (and intellectualocentric) philosophy of action represented. I wanted initially to account for practice in its humblest forms – rituals, matrimonial choices, the mundane economic conduct of everyday life, etc. – by escaping both the objectivism of action understood as a mechanical reaction 'without an agent' and the subjectivism which portrays action as the deliberate pursuit of a conscious intention, the free project of a conscience positing its own ends and maximising its utility through rational computation» (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 120–121).

On the other hand, the territory of Gorizia has experienced the tragedy of cultural assimilation, particularly on the Italian side. This event has exacerbated for many decades the conflict between the Italian majority and the harassed Slovenian minority. When the border barriers disappeared in 2004, three ethnic components found themselves interacting: the Italian side, the Slovenians from Nova Gorica and the Slovenian minority from Gorizia. The reconstruction of the multi-ethnic social fabric could only restart at the level of everyday life practices, and not without difficulty. The collective memory suffered and still suffers from unhealed wounds. Intercultural communication is a process that cannot ignore the conflict generated by diversity.: «It sounds strange, but each member of the Slovenian minority in Gorizia has two birthplaces: one is called Gorica, the other Gorizia. Gorica speaks, reads, thinks and dreams in Slovene and Italian, and Gorizia speaks only in Italian. For decades, Slovenes in Italy have been a thorn in the side of the country because of their demand for special protection. They were a problem in the bilateral talks between Italy and Yugoslavia and Slovenia after

its independence. After obtaining legal protection in 1999 and 2001 and following the enlargement of the European Union in 2004 and Schengen in 2007, the community is in search of a normal life. As members of an integrated national community and Italian citizens, they are embedded in the environment of the majority nation. Therefore, they are confronted with the everyday problems that the Italian majority has. Some members of the minority fight the silent assimilation – they are a minority inside the minority, but structured, with its institutions and media, represented (until when?) in Rome, in the regional government and in the municipalities – which, in the face of the gradual degradation of identity, results also in the lack of innovative force and the passive preservation of what already exists. We want to create ‘a third space’ beyond national identities. Help the Slovenian minority, but also all of us citizens of Gorizia out of the language-ideology-trap and hostages-of-the-past-trap. Taking the schizophrenic existence out of being a ‘minority’ in your birth country and being a ‘foreigner’ in your supposed ‘home’ country. If the Slovenian minority is to be able to live equally well in Milan and in Ljubljana – perhaps that will be the day where we can all realise the ideal of European linguistic and cultural pluralism». ⁹ Europe needs new words, honest words, lots of them. The joyful ones and the painful ones. Nova Gorica and Gorizia are perfect for the job because the building, destroying, rebuilding, painting, bypassing, imagining, idealising and cursing walls and fences is essentially what we have been doing for the past couple of centuries. On the other hand, we are a perfect example of why borders are the last thing any modern European should aspire to. And we are in desperate need of reminding ourselves the very same thing. ¹⁰ The aim is to build a house with foundations in two countries. The ultimate European house. A material proof of what can we achieve if we really decide to work together and give our European Union a fair chance. In a growing atmosphere of distrust toward EU institutions, in the shadow of Brexit and among rising euro skeptical populist political movements, we want to emphasise the worth and benefits of European legal and financial mechanisms. We want to explore these tools, which might be evolving and thus imperfect, but have already given extraordinary results and hold an immense potential for the future. Nova Gorica and Gorizia can show that European mechanisms, though they are complicated, heavy and boring beasts, actually work. Our European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation, the EGTC GO, has managed to invest ten million euros in shared projects, proving it is possible to take transnational collaboration to a whole new level. GO! Borderless has chosen the EGTC as a delivery platform with the ambition to create an example of good practice. ¹¹ The existence of a boundary has always been (and still is) considered an obvious assumption for the construction of the identity of a system. In intercultural communication, however, the border is considered an obstacle to the reciprocal intercultural adaptation and a cause of ethnocentric conflicts. While in a hierarchical society the boundaries produce a sense of safety and are a warning against the possible crises of an ethnic identity that needs to be defended, in a multi-coding society the boundaries between cultures create claustrophobia and a sense of compulsion. In this sense, the creation of borders indicates a negative closure, as evidenced by the fact that geographical boundaries are used to separate and define spaces for conquest and possession, and that one of the first measures indicating a new union or collaboration is their dissolution. Boundaries overwhelm the openings to the possible multiplicity of cultural expressions. One of the most interesting attempts is well represented by the concept of threshold (Richter

Malabotta, 2002). What we should expect is the suspended step of the stork of those who for their personal biography are ideally located on the threshold of a no-man's land that separates the different cultural worlds: it is an openness that evokes the dissolution of the borders. *The suspended step of the stork* is the title of a film of the Greek director Theo Anghelopulos and refers to the communicative action of a commander of a troop on a frontier with a hostile country: to show a journalist the meaning of his role, the commander raises a leg and suspends it on the border line, while a soldier on the other side of the raider takes aim with his gun, ready to shoot as soon as the man crosses the border. The commander comments on his gesture, observing that a step beyond the border means either to be on the other side or to be dead» (Baraldi, 2003, p. 168). Creating a threshold means setting the conditions for a border passage: the threshold is the non-place, a state of suspension of the difference. The suspended step of the stork symbolises, then, the suspension of the situation on the border and the consequent need to stand on one side or the other, which is the essence of ethnocentrism (normative or modernist) as a form of intercultural communication. The threshold is the place where the suspended step of the stork acquires meaning. The thresholds are spaces «where either the encounter and the contact are facilitated and the pretext for cancelling the border» (Baraldi, 2003, p. 15). Opening the borders and creating thresholds between cultures is not a simple or painless operation: it evokes the modernist and individualist idea that the loss of a cultural identity is a major problem. Were borders abolished, cultural diversity should disappear and, therefore, a new monoculture arise. In communication, borders appear to guarantee the maintenance of cultural diversity as well as being considered essential to foster intercultural communication. The concept of threshold indicates the abolition of an ethnocentric boundary that creates inequality or discrimination. However, it is not easy to distinguish this type of boundary from those who maintain cultural diversity and/or offer guarantees of reproduction of other forms of communication. For this reason, it is important to clarify the form of an intercultural communication that ensures the opening and the creation of thresholds, that is, the reconstruction of the boundary of an adequate communication (Baraldi, 2003, pp. 168–170). All these statements have moulded the practices of everyday life of the citizens of the territory of Gorizia-Nova Gorica, shaping a specific and original cross-border culture: «A central impetus to the development of everyday-life sociology was the growing dissatisfaction in mid-twentieth century social thought with the approach contained in classical and contemporary macro theory. Both positivism and critical sociology were seen as overly deterministic in their portrayal of the individual in society: The actor was depicted as either a tabula rasa, internalising the norms and values of society out of a desire for group membership, or as a homo economicus, developing social, political, and ideological characteristics as a result of his/her class membership. As a result, these traditional approaches generated an overly passive and constrained view of the actor» (Adler, Adler Adler, & Fontana, 1987, p. 218). What happened not only in recent decades, but especially in the months of isolation imposed by the recent pandemic, testifies – as if there was still a need for it – not the passivity of a constrained social actor, but of an active and strong citizen with a cosmopolitan identity built day after day in the humble practices of everyday life.

5. Conclusion

Let me add some concluding remarks on the theme of identity in an open world order. The case study on cross-border identity in Gorizia seeks to highlight the relevance of a convergent and multidisciplinary analysis. The recent transformations in the direction of what Beck defined as a cosmopolitan society has stimulated reflections and research that, starting from Beck himself, focused on the macro dimension of the sense of boundarylessness and the study of new and more adequate policies for a cosmopolitan governance (Beck, 2006). In the present contribution we have aimed to present a micro-sociological perspective of analysis. A new identity is in fact something that takes shape in everyday activities, which are made up of tactics and recipes for survival that pose as a response and adaptation to social change. If changes are perceived as a threat, in the opinion of De Certeau (1984) whom we have taken as our reference author, the tactics of everyday life will eventually give rise to policies of resistance. What we would like to stress is that an analysis carried out on a micro-social level should in no way oppose research on a macro-social level. The two elements should proceed towards a perspective of convergence. A new identity in an open world is constructed by the encounter between top-down governance policies and bottom-up everyday life policies. Borrowing the felicitous expression coined by Henry Jenkins (2006) and adapting it to our context, we could perhaps rightly define new identities in an open world as 'convergence identities'. The convergence of analysis plans can therefore only encourage further social research projects to lead by a multidisciplinary perspective. Studying the cross-border identity of Gorizia-Nova Gorica has been a first attempt in that direction which has encompassed either historical and anthropological studies and, of course, studies from the domain of the sociology of culture.

Notes

1. https://www.go2025.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BidBook_ENG_1-web-small.pdf, p. 37 (last access 3/viii/2020).
2. <https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/speeches/1946-1963-elder-statesman/the-sinews-of-peace/> (last access 3/viii/2020).
3. https://www.go2025.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BidBook_ENG_1-web-small.pdf, p. 5 (last access 4/viii/2020).
4. idem, pp. 5–6 (last access 4/viii/2020).
5. <https://chisineu.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/certeau-michel-de-the-practice-of-everyday-life.pdf>
6. https://www.go2025.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BidBook_ENG_1-web-small.pdf, p. 38 (last access 5/viii/2020).
7. idem, p. 6 (last access 5/viii/2020).
8. idem, p. 23 (last access 4/viii/2020).
9. https://www.go2025.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/BidBook_ENG_1-web-small.pdf, p. 38 (last access 6/viii/2020).
10. idem, p. 37 (last access 6/viii/2020).
11. idem, p. 38 (last access 6/viii/2020).

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