

# LEARNING BY COLLECTING: AMATEUR COLLECTORS AND THEIR SHIFTING POSITIONS IN THE ISONZO FRONT HERITAGIZATION AND TOURISM ADAPTATION

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**Abstract:** Modern collection of war-related artifacts and military objects in the Upper Soča Valley started in the 1980s and increased after Slovenia gained independence in 1991. Today, eighteen private collections are open to the public in the Gorizia region (Koren 2015: 205), but it is estimated that there are fifty to one hundred more (Kofol 2015: 276) that have not been inventoried by any publicly funded institutions. This article<sup>1</sup> evaluates the phenomenon and growth of collecting artifacts from the Isonzo Front. The heritagization of the front's material culture and its adaption to tourism started in 1990, but it greatly developed in the following decades. The global marking of the First World War centenary (2014–2018) gave this development further impetus. Within these processes, amateur collectors are increasingly perceived with ambiguity. On the one hand, “good” collectors are presented in the front's heritage landscape as its founding fathers, but on the other “bad” collectors are presented as problematic in relation to the region's archaeological heritage.

**Keywords:** heritage management, heterotopias, Isonzo Front, private collections, tourism development

The Isonzo Front was part of the six-hundred-kilometer front between Italy and the Austro-Hungarian Empire. It was ninety kilometers long and it stretched along the Soča River between the Julian Alps and the Adriatic coast. The front was formed on May 23rd, 1915, when Italy declared war against Austro-Hungary, and lasted until November 9th, 1917, when the Italian army was defeated by Austro-Hungarian and German forces near the town of Kobarid (Italian: *Caporetto*; Koren 2015: 17–19). The front claimed the lives of about five hundred

thousand soldiers of various nationalities, which were brought to the front from different parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy. Moreover, the front deeply affected the civilian population because many residents of nearby towns and villages were evacuated to various parts of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Italy (Sedmak 1997: 91–92).

The Isonzo Front profoundly changed the landscape of the Soča Valley. This change has been inscribed into the Soča Valley similar to a palimpsest of various layers of “conflict landscapes” throughout the twentieth century (see Saunders et al. 2013). A complex system of fortifications, trenches, shelters, caverns, and barracks was connected to the hinterland by military roads and the railway. The hinterland consisted of numerous depots, waterworks, cableways, hospitals, cemeteries, brothels, and workshops, and they strongly cut into the life of the civilian population. At least in Kobarid, most of this supply infrastructure was located in towns and villages (see Sedmak 1997).

Although much more could be said about life before, during, and after the First World War (see Svoljšak 1993, 2017) and about particular battles on the Isonzo Front (see Cimprič 2017; Koren 2015; Kuhar 2017; Močnik 2017), this article rethinks how the front’s legacies have been treated, changed, reorganized, and presented in the last three decades, after the initial opening of the Kobarid Museum of the First World War in 1990. In particular, I am interested in private collections and their changing position when the institutional landscape of front-related organizations, associations, and stakeholders has developed into a vast network, which, despite its general inclusiveness and dialogic orientation in producing meanings, is establishing specific conceptual and cultural orders (Meijer-van Mensch 2017: 25).

In relation to objects and things, these orders create a gap that can be described with Foucauldian heterotopia, a concept that “reflects on how potentially regulative these collective modes and practices are” (ibid.). A potential unwanted result of this heterotopic gap between physical places and their social construction is the consolidation of heritage institutions in “unified space”, which can create a “homogeneous ‘monster’” (ibid.) that suppresses the subjectivity, creativity, passion, inspiration, and enthusiasm of amateur collectors instead of being inspired by them (Meijer-van Mensch 2017: 26–27).

Given that adaption to tourism is another powerful stream of development in the Upper Soča Valley, which goes in at least two directions – one toward heritagization of the Isonzo Front remains in situ, and the other toward creating hospitality (infra)structures – amateur collectors have found themselves in an inevitable process of “soft” integration of their hobby into this increasingly complex landscape. They have been given credit by publicly funded museums, such as the Tolmin Museum and the Nova Gorica Museum, to open their collec-

tions to the public. They are also presented under the aegis of the Walk of Peace in the Soča Region Foundation, a complementary institution to the Kobarid Museum, which was established in 2000. Their knowledge about the front and local cultural history has been recognized as useful, enriching, and important for the overall character of the valley. However, this type of knowledge is also seen as an inferior addition to “real knowledge” because it focuses on the battlefields, military history, and technologies of war.

What I show here is that the knowledge from amateur collectors’ study of wartime artifacts is what tourism development of the Soča Valley needs just as much as it needs a sensitive, humanized, and antiwar narration of the Isonzo Front. Tourism cannot survive without at least some spectacular content that surprises, animates, and engages visitors and guests. As Scheller and Urry (2004: 6) state, “places [to play] are not fixed or given, but are themselves ‘in play’ in relationship to multiple mobilities”. Tourism constantly needs new, exciting places, which are “always ‘around the corner’ surfacing out of the swirl of economic, social and cultural processes” (ibid.). The private collections with their often special and eccentric owners are an example of such places in play. Furthermore, collectors’ way of learning about the front has importantly shaped (and still shapes) local endeavors for the front’s heritagization and its interpretation.

## **INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF ISONZO FRONT HERITAGE**

The marking and commemoration of the First World War centenary (2014–2018) was organized globally through hundreds of events, projects, resources, and news items. In the context of these activities, ever new approaches, meanings, and presentations of the First World War have been prepared for future generations. The First World War became a prominent subject for military, cultural, and art historians, museum and heritage professionals, political scientists, and anthropologists (see, e.g., Hudales & Roženberger 2017; Jezernik & Fikfak 2018). The war’s multifaceted and many-layered legacy, assessed and organized through these new endeavors, is becoming increasingly complex. An important orientation of these new thoughtful public representations of the First World War is a sensitive and contextual approach toward different people that suffered because of it, rather than solely a reconstruction of the war’s battles and offensives (see also Gorgus 2017; Kregar 2017; Svoljšak 1993, 2017).<sup>2</sup>

In addition, the First World War’s cultural significance is emphasized among archaeologists (Košir 2014; Matás & Roberts & Telfer 2014; Saunders 2004, 2010). Their new perspectives are based especially on a shift from older bat-

tlefield archaeology to a wider, more socially oriented vision that is enriched with anthropological theory and conflict archaeology (Saunders 2010; Saunders et al. 2013). Among relevant issues for this new archaeological orientation, (trans)nationalization of the First World War heritage and its commercialization for tourism purposes is highlighted as well as private collections of war artifacts and “a vigorous international trade in such items” (Saunders 2010: 27). Regarding this trade, Saunders (2010: 29–30) wrote:

*... objects can be dug up by archaeologists or by looters, and can travel by a variety of different routes to a private collection, a museum, or an internet auction site. If enough interesting items are recovered from the ground they can become the centerpiece of a new museum exhibition that in turn becomes a “must-see” stop on a battlefield tour, and at which, on occasion, other battlefield souvenirs (real and fake) are sold. In this way it can be seen how war artefacts can become caught in a spider’s web of war history, war heritage and tourism, and are further entangled with issues about their authenticity and the ethics of collecting and exhibiting them.*

This “spider’s web” in which war artifacts are set in heterotopias that emerge between ideologies and collections on the one hand and in “constant circulation” (Saunders et al. 2013: 47) on the other is even more complex, especially if one considers the endeavors in creating humanized and democratized perspective on the First World War, which has gone along with such treatment of history since the 1970s (Gorgus 2017: 138). Thousands of artifacts without reference to their owners are useless for such a democratic interpretation of history, which wants untold stories to be told, unheard voices to be heard, meaningful artifacts with stories to be contributed, and reflections and feelings of the visitors and the local population to be shared (see Gorgus 2017: 144).

The Kobarid Museum was also conceived in this vein. It was established by a group of local enthusiasts in 1990. With the help of curators from the Nova Gorica Museum, they approached the First World War with an antiwar message, and primarily highlighted the tragedy of ordinary men and their personal stories. This aspect strongly prevailed over the military operations, battles, and warfare, even if the cover story of the Kobarid Museum is the Twelfth Offensive of the Isonzo Front, the “Breakthrough at Caporetto”, or the “Miracle of Caporetto” (Walk of Peace 2017).<sup>3</sup> The exhibitions that the Kobarid Museum hosted after its initial success<sup>4</sup> were conceived as a cycle in which all of the nations involved in the Battle of Caporetto had an opportunity to present themselves. With these exhibitions, the museum obtained additional documentation about the Isonzo Front from archives and war museums in Vienna and Budapest. In the context of this, the former director of the Kobarid Museum, Jože Šerbec, said in November 2011:

*We are not a museum of artifacts. We are predominantly a museum of stories, documents, photographs, and cartography... we are not talking about artifacts, but about a fund. Because a grenade, if it is Hungarian, it does not mean anything, and also if it is German or Italian. You have way too much iron in private collections, or, let's say, in the state museums. On both this or that side.*

Although this distance from amateur collectors is still present at the Kobarid Museum, the Walk of Peace, a sister institution of the Kobarid Museum, which was established in 2000, recognized the collectors as independent presenters of history and war, and it represents them in its brochures, guides, and main exhibition hall (Fig. 1).

The aim of the Walk of Peace was to add to the Kobarid Museum's achievements in terms of acquiring deeper knowledge about the Isonzo Front, presenting it in a more scholarly way, creating, managing, and promoting its battlefields in situ, and coordinating many front-related activities that started to mushroom locally and nationally after the Kobarid Museum's success. This time the pacifist message was put at the forefront of the Isonzo Front presentation and was institutionalized in the name of this new organization and with its logo. It is notable that the soft image of a dove almost diametrically opposes the dramatic image of the breakthrough, which is symbolized in the Kobarid Museum's logo (Fig. 2 & 3).



**Figure 1.** Private collections are represented in the main exhibition hall of the Walk of Peace. Photograph by the author 2017.



*Figure 2 & 3. Two styles of narratives about the Isonzo Front as seen in the logos of the Kobarid Museum (left) and the Walk of Peace (right).*

In the next decade, the Walk of Peace made an enormous effort in preparing the landscape for cultural tourism. Battlefields were presented in a scholarly manner, trenches were cleaned, equipped, and preserved, and outdoor museums were established on the frontlines and connected with a thematic trail from the Alps to the Adriatic (see Koren 2015). Specialized tourist guides were educated and trained for the area, a new documentation-information center was established, thematic exhibitions, conferences, and other First World War-related events were held, and, last but not least, EU funds were obtained through various cooperation and cross-border programs and projects. All of these activities and many more also attracted various heritage specialists, museum curators, professional historians, and other social scientists and scholars in the humanities. In two decades or so, the front was given a scholarly touch, promoted, adapted for tourism, and made ready for the global commemoration of the First World War centenary (2014–2018; Fig. 4).

With the centenary of the First World War, the organizations related to the Isonzo Front are crucially set within a European conceptual and cultural order, which in relation to the landscapes of the Soča Valley creates regulative heterotopias (Meijer-van Mensch 2017: 25) and extends into many aspects of the local population's lives. The physical landscape is interpreted with a "unified space" (ibid.), a network of institutions, programs, associations, and official



*Figure 4. The Walk of Peace logo for marking the First World War centenary.*

bodies, which does not directly suppress the creativity, passion, and subjective initiatives, but selects and tolerates them. As long as the new ideas and initiatives fit into the general ideological order of commemoration of the First World War and sustainable tourism development, they can fruitfully enrich the equipped, clean, and sanitized caverns, trenches, and fortifications or – for better or worse – add new ones. This order is therefore not stifling and dominating in the Adornian sense of “cultural industries”. It instead promotes inclusiveness, which is epitomized in the softer concept of “creative industries”.

The full package of the Isonzo Front heritage includes all sorts of representations and dimensions of the front, which seek to fulfill the needs of other segments of visitors to the Soča Valley as well as the needs of the local population. In tourism, the heterotopias of the First World War interpretation and sense-making are flexible and not only allow, but encourage and promote cultural activities, events, and involvement of as many initiatives as possible, which add to the basic mission of commemorating the dead soldiers, highlighting the madness of war, and pointing to the suffering that wars bring to life in general.

With this firmly established framework and deep symbolic message that, again, was cultivated from the very beginnings of the front’s heritagization, the curse of labeling the commemorative landscapes of war as a field for “dark tourism” or “thanatourism” (see Baldwin & Sharpley 2009; Seaton 2009) was successfully avoided. Various other stakeholders could enter the field and engage in serious tourism business, which has brought to the surface the more trivial and spectacular content of the front’s landscape, so that even the Kobarid Museum and the Walk of Peace could not resist contributing their share.

## METHODOLOGY

The information for this article is derived from a series of short ethnographic field studies, which were carried out within a program at the University of Ljubljana's Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. Kobarid and the Upper Soča Valley were already selected for research tutorials between 2011 and 2013, when tourism was at the forefront of the research (see Kravanja 2014: 94–97). Between 2015 and 2017, the ethnographic field tutorial was organized as shown in Table 1.

Field	Dates	Students, number, course	Subjects
Bovec and surrounding villages	Nov. 20–22, 2015	First year, 11, Anthropology of Tourism	Inter-institutional space of tourism; tourism landscapes; participation and ownership of the local population
Kobarid and surrounding villages; Outdoor museums in the mountains; Private collections in the region; Monte San Michele, Italy; Memorial on Cerje Hill (see endnote 2)	Nov. 17–20, 2016	Second year, 11, Anthropology of Space and Place	Historically thematized landscapes; social circumstances and actors; the First World War landscape; memory and heritage; borders and borderlands; tourism; space and place
Kobarid and surrounding villages; Outdoor museums in the mountains; Tolmin and its institutions; Most na Soči; Private collections in the region; Sveta Gora above Nova Gorica; Memorial on Cerje Hill (see endnote 2)	Nov. 23–26, 2017	Second year, 18, Anthropology of Space and Place	Landscapes of the First World War in Slavia Friulana; associations thematizing the First World War; landscape through the eyes of collectors; reenactments of war in situ; monuments and memorial trails; cemeteries and ossuaries; the First World War and nature; thematic hiking trails and their future; landscapes of the First World War in protected natural areas
Total	11 days	40 students	19 subjects

*Table 1. Fieldwork research tutorials 2015–2017.*



I prepared the fieldwork tutorial in Bovec (2015) myself, but organized the subsequent fieldwork (in 2016 and 2017) together with a colleague, Miha Kozorog. Because both of us were born in the Upper Soča Valley, we already knew most people working in the field, and together we prepared the logistics for the fieldwork. We conceived the research framework, conducted preparatory seminars (reading literature, discussions, and profiling themes and departure points with the students), directed the fieldwork (meetings with publicly funded institutions, guided field excursions to outdoor museums, providing contacts with relevant interlocutors, and conducting focus groups in the evenings), and assessed the student results (presentations of field materials, and evaluating the quality of the field materials and written essays). The collected field materials (interviews, transcriptions, photographs, and field notes) were delivered to the documentation center at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology under the title “Landscapes of the First World War in the Soča Valley”.

For this article, the materials derive from my field visits to amateur collectors and their private collections, which I made together with students (see Fig. 5).



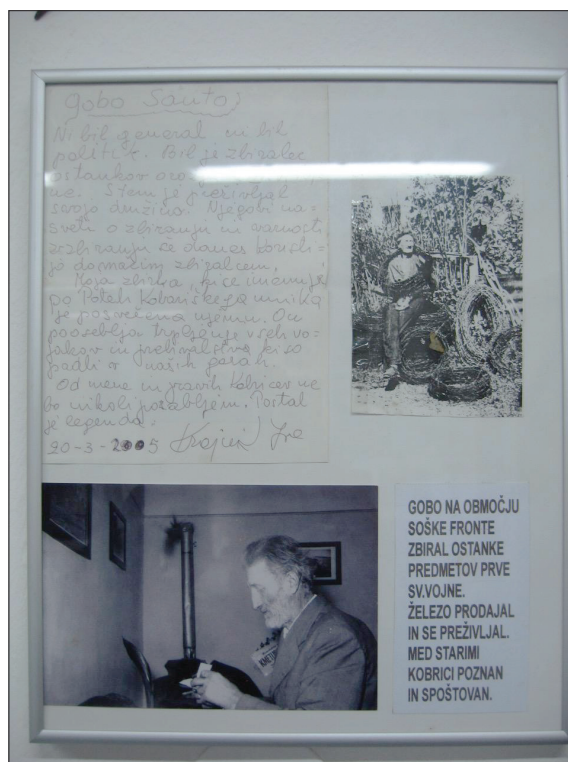
**Figure 5.** Students conducting ethnographic fieldwork with Zdravko Mazora, Sr., in his private collection in the village of Breginj. Photograph by the author 2017.

Because Kobarid is my hometown, I have been observing its tourism and heritage development since the mid-1990s, during my student years, when I was also involved in revitalizing remote areas and villages on the Italian border. Within those projects, I already recorded private and publicly funded collections in the area and interacted with most of the local people involved in culture, museum curators, and development managers. Before the current project on the heritage of the First World War (see Acknowledgements), I was also involved in the national research project on Triglav National Park (2011–2014; see Bajuk Senčar 2013; Fikfak & Bajuk Senčar 2015; Hudales 2015; Kozorog & Poljak Istenič 2013), which gave me a good basis for further research on the heritage of the Isonzo Front (see Kravanja 2014). For all of these reasons, this article is written in an interpretive style that, on the one hand, covers the last three decades and, on the other, deals with “reading” the recent developments concerning the position of amateur collectors and their collections in the context of the front’s heritage and the institutional tourism landscape.

## **AMATEUR COLLECTORS OF ARTIFACTS FROM THE ISONZO FRONT**

The first accumulation of material from the Isonzo Front started in the aftermath of the First World War. Refugees from the front began returning to their ruined homes in the 1920s and started to clear the battlefields and remove wartime debris from the vicinity of their homes. Raw materials, especially iron, were either sold to wholesalers or recycled; many items such as tinsplate, metal roofs, (barbed) wire, wooden posts, helmets, shoes, clothes, pipes, canteens, and anything of any value were reused for various private purposes in households. Entire families could live by selling iron. In the town of Kobarid, one of these recyclers was a former Italian soldier from the Isonzo Front, Gobo Santo. He made a living for himself and his family by accumulating debris from the war. Ivo Krajnik, one of the first collectors in the region, dedicated his collection of approximately 3,500 items to him (Fig. 6).

Regardless of this initial clearing of the battlefields, much material – in fact, tons of iron – have remained not only beneath the ground, but on the surface of the Soča Valley and its surrounding mountains and plains until the present day. Especially materials made of iron and tinsplate (and such were the majority of strictly military items) remained in fairly good condition over the decades, when the first collectors found them and started to create museums and collections with them.



**Figure 6.** A dedication to a forerunner of the collectors of the Isonzo Front materials, an Italian soldier Gobo Santo. The museum collection The Paths of Retreat at Kobarid 1917 in Kobarid. Photograph by the author 2017.

## THE EARLY COLLECTORS AND THEIR METHODS

The early collectors were primarily interested in local history. The content of their collections was far from being only weapons and military equipment. They intentionally searched for anything old that remained from the past generations. Important triggers for collecting were also the earthquakes (in 1976 and 1998), when various items from damaged and demolished houses were taken to the homes of these early collectors. The locals got used to these strange men, and themselves started to bring them various things, from rags and bones to things that they were attached to and could not throw away for sentimental reasons. The nature of the early collectors' work was therefore highly interactive. They were always considered somewhat odd figures because through their hobby they stood out in the community more than others.

The private collections started being seriously inventoried by the Tolmin Museum in the mid-2000s (Kofol 2015: 276). The creation of inventories led to consultation between museum curators and collectors because each side had specific knowledge that the other lacked. The Tolmin Museum, for example, held a cycle of lectures specifically for collectors, where restoration specialists presented various procedures for maintaining and restoring various materials (ibid.). Today, artifacts from private collections are occasionally incorporated into the museum's public exhibits.

However, the number of amateur collectors that are ready to open their collections to the public is decreasing. If an amateur collector wishes to do so, his collection has to be inventoried. Each artifact must have a document and a copy of the record must be stored at the Tolmin Museum. On the one hand, such artifacts are under supervision and cannot be sold, exchanged, or given away. On the other hand, the inventoried private collections together form a powerful heterotopic tool for communicating various ideas and messages to the public (see, e.g., Poljak Istenič 2015; Dapit & Ivančič Kutin & Ledinek Lozej 2015). However, the collectors cannot participate in constructing these messages because the basic register they work with is different. They maintain the artifacts and organize them into the order of a collection, whereas the conceptual and social orders that create heterotopic relations between things and their interpretation are another matter. In relation to a publicly funded museum, the amateur collectors can turn into some sort of depot maintenance workers or repairmen, whereas their collections, once they are inventoried, become some sort of manageable multi-sited common depot.

In the framework of tourism development in the Soča Valley, I already noted that the private collections started to be promoted within the Walk of Peace exhibition hall as an additional or optional attraction for visitors interested in the front. In this framework, the private collections are added to the Isonzo Front heritage landscape of outdoor museums, trails, interactive maps, information flows, exhibitions, and more. This conceptual and social order of tourism is slightly different from that of museums because it brings the collectors onto an (often international) stage as spokespersons and proponents of the material authenticity of the war. Their role within this framework is to heterotopically complement the master story with brutal "hard evidence" of the weapons and to highlight the technological side of the First World War warfare. In this way, the central Isonzo Front heritage institutions can distance themselves from the vulgar brutality of war and cultivate the interpretation of war in accordance with the major standards of European commemoration because the collectors bear the task of satisfying leisure tourists' quest for more exciting and spectacular stimulus instead of them.

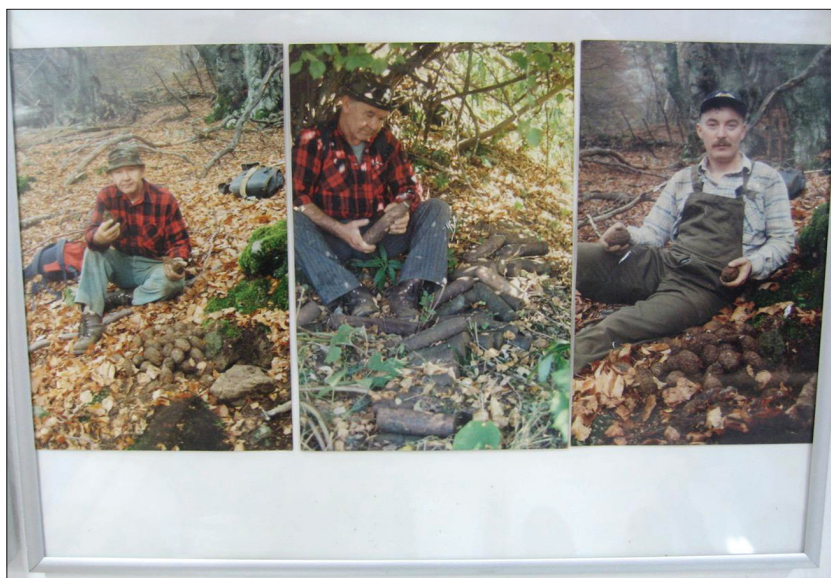


**Figure 7.** Channels and fields of interaction through which the collectors acquire artifacts, communicate information and knowledge about them, and engage with others in maintaining their collections.

However, apart from including amateur collectors in these unifying heritage and tourism frameworks, and giving them particular roles within them, the collectors themselves are in constant interaction with the local surroundings. They have therefore built their own additional networks and channels, through which they communicate with their items and with the knowledge that they acquire from them (Fig. 7).

## THE INTRODUCTION OF MILITARY OBJECTS AND METAL DETECTORS INTO THE COLLECTORS' WORLD

Military items that remained on remote battlefields, either from the Isonzo Front or from the Second World War, gradually became more interesting to some of these early amateur collectors in the 1980s. The time was also ripe because of the relaxed control of the authorities in communist Yugoslavia (see Kaučič 2017). These items were cleaned, repaired, arranged, stored, selected, and gradually incorporated among other artifacts in the collections.



**Figure 8.** The late Ivo Krajnik, Sr. (left) and his friend inspecting grenades collected in the field. The museum collection The Paths of Retreat at Kobarid 1917 in Kobarid. Photograph by the author 2017.

For many, the military items soon became a particularly interesting sort of artifact. Their nature was different and they were primarily attractive because of their technological features. Being “anonymous”, they were similar to “anonymous” fallen soldiers, yet to be identified. However, their detached objectivity and their difficulty in both ethical and technological terms was what initially attracted their collectors. On the surface, the actual use of these objects had to be imagined and the context of this imagination was the technological evolution of weapons and military equipment. In contact with these objects, including with their enormous quantity, advancing technological development was obvious and pointed to the early exponential growth of industrial production.

However, among the early amateur collectors, a shift toward imagining the life of the common soldier soon occurred because they already had experience with other artifacts that they had most often acquired in a package with a story. The sections of military artifacts, which were usually arranged according to the national armies that fought on the Isonzo Front (Fig. 9), of course remained there and were further complemented either with the help of fellow collectors or through the rapidly growing First World War antiquities market. In line



**Figure 9.** A military artifact section against an old agriculture-related section in a private collection. Ethno-war collection in Breginj. Photograph by the author 2017.

with this flow, the early collectors started using metal detectors as soon as they became available, but many of them also turned their interest away from weapons to small personal items of soldiers, which bore more potential for imagining the experience of war. Last but not least, some also turned away from the war altogether and found more excitement in older, even prehistoric items that, in the best possible scenario, led them to consult with an archaeologist (Fig. 10).

In comparison to this older generation of collectors and their children (and now even grandchildren), the newcomers were not capable of such shifts. The context for the new metal detector users was different because the communication channels had changed and the availability of information was much greater, and was also of a different nature. The established collectors often claimed that the old material culture in itself is not interesting to the new generations. However, they did not see that the military objects better fit contemporary quantity-oriented values, where the completeness of a specialized collection of a certain group of objects is perhaps more important than the individuality and extraordinariness of major pieces.



**Figure 10.** A 'big find': a Hallstatt ring from the 6th century BC confirmed by archaeological analysis as an important find of the local area. The ethno-war collection in Breginj. Photograph by the author 2017.



**Figure 11.** The First World War antiquities market in Šempeter pri Gorici, organized by the Isonzo Front association. Photograph by the author 2016.



Concerning the First World War materials on the Isonzo Front battlefields, there soon appeared a feeling that items are vanishing due to the antiquities market. "A lot was sold, but a lot is still lying there," is a common claim of the early collectors. However, they have also claimed that nowadays it is difficult to find very typical artifacts in the Soča Valley. The material value of the artifacts on the market varies in any case because it has to be regarded in the context of the collection where the item is about to be placed. At any rate, the memorial value for newcomers, in contrast to early collectors, is less important than the material value. Similar to the early collectors, detached objectivity and technological focus are at the forefront in the market. Among younger amateur collectors, who combine their hobby with recreation and hiking, even the simple rush of adrenaline that accompanies the signal of the metal detector is enough to continue their activities.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

This article showed how the conceptual and cultural order of presenting the Isonzo Front heritage has gradually tightened up Isonzo Front-related landscapes through the work of the Kobarid Museum and the Walk of Peace. Because an important feature of contemporary museums is the dialogical nature of their activities, the status of their collections has changed (see Hudales & Roženberger 2017). More than museums of artifacts, these institutions are increasingly becoming documentation and communication centers. In the light of this, it is noteworthy how visionary the founders of the Kobarid Museum already were in the 1990s.

However, along with this, a heterotopic gap opened between interpretation of the battles of the Isonzo Front and its material remains, which were gathered among the population of the Soča Valley, most notably in private collections. The collectors were integrated into these increasingly complex orders and have gradually opened their private collections to the public. On the one hand, their relations with museum curators were mutually beneficial because they obtained much-needed access to professional knowledge; at least some of them have made good use of this and continue to cooperate with the curators. On the other hand, the museum curators and heritage specialists are representatives of publicly funded institutions that are in charge of maintaining order, making possible supervision over the private collections. Regarding this point, the relations between them are normally tenuous because the collectors must subordinate their activity to experts and the dominant orders that they represent.

This tension further intensified when the new Heritage Protection Act changed the rules of the game in 2008. Article 3 of this act newly defined archaeological heritage. Arms, ammunition and other military materials, vehicles, and vessels or their parts that had been under the ground or water at least fifty years were included. With this act, the collection of war-related materials became strictly forbidden, and the act also interferes with the existing private collections. In practice, it did not achieve its desired goals because violations are impossible to track down in the field.

The second stream of thought in this article concerned tourism development in relation to the global commemoration of the First World War centenary (2014–2018). Because the need to present detailed military knowledge about Isonzo Front battles, tactics, and the like could not be pushed to the side this time, even the Walk of Peace and the Kobarid Museum decided to cross the subtle line between participatory strategies and dialogic approaches to history on the one hand and detached objectivity emphasizing the destructive side of warfare on the other. The Battle of Caporetto (see endnote 3) was reenacted at Mount Kolovrat on September 17, 2017, with 150 actors on both sides, pyrotechnic effects, and simulations of explosions.

The pressing factor for supporting these kinds of representations that seem at odds with scholarly and democratized narratives of historians, professional museum curators (see endnote 2), and national institutions was – apart from the hectic pace of organizing the First World War centenary events – (sustainable) tourism development and hospitality practices. Publicly funded institutions did not want to openly display the weapons, military equipment, and technological evolution that so importantly marked the beginning of twentieth-century industrialized warfare (Saunders 2004: 5). This was left to the amateur collectors, and for this task they had space as well as support from and proper representation by the decision-makers of the Isonzo Front heritage institutional environment. Now it seems that also these roles, or at least the division of work, is changing or perhaps even turning upside down.

This article showed how the early collectors gained the reputation of deserving members of their communities, whereas the reputation of contemporary newcomers on the collecting scene is diametrically opposed: they are treated as metal detector users, looters of the valuable archaeological heritage of the Isonzo Front, who dig for war-related artifacts and other metal items to sell on the antiquities market. It seems that the times of traditional collectors are over, and the question of how to integrate the “bad” collectors into the heritage networks instead of chasing them away, with all of the pitfalls that this might bring to the Upper Soča Valley’s heritage, remains open for further examination.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the Kobarid institutions for presentations of their work and their availability to the students from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Ljubljana. The amateur collectors of the Soča Valley did a great job curating through collections and being available for detailed interviews. I am grateful to the Student Organization and the Student Board of the Faculty of Arts in Ljubljana, which funded part of the student costs for the project *Landscapes of the First World War (2016 and 2017)*. Thanks to Miha Kozorog for cooperation in directing the fieldwork research tutorials. I also benefited tremendously from the numerous discussions with the students in the courses Anthropology of Tourism and Anthropology of Space and Place, and in the fieldwork in Kobarid (2015–2017), as well as from the discussions with my colleagues in the national research project *Heritage of the First World War: Representations and Reinterpretations (2016–2018)*.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The article is part of the research project *Dediščina prve svetovne vojne: reprezentacije in reinterpretacije* (Heritage of the First World War: Representations and Reinterpretations) (J6-7173) funded by the Slovenian Research Agency (cf. Jezernik & Fikfak 2018).
- <sup>2</sup> A notable example of this pacifist and humanistic approach to the Isonzo Front is the excellent exhibition *Človek in vojna* (Man and War), prepared by Karla Kofol, an ethnologist and curator at the Tolmin Museum. The exhibition won the Slovenian Ethnological Society's Murko Award in 2016. Its focus is on the everyday life of soldiers, civilians, and society during the Isonzo Front. It does not include a single weapon. The exhibition is still open to the public at the Memorial to the Defenders of the Slovenian Homeland on Cerje Hill above the town of Miren, Slovenia.
- <sup>3</sup> The Twelfth Battle took place in a rugged mountainous area of the Julian Alps. In tourism discourse it is often advertised as the "greatest highland battle in human history". It was the only attack by the Austro-Hungarian and German army on the Isonzo Front. It took place on October 24, 1917, and was a complete surprise for the Italian army. In only four days the Italians were badly defeated and the frontline was pushed as far as the Piave River, 170 km west of the Soča Valley. The battle claimed the lives of at least thirteen thousand Italian soldiers and five thousand soldiers on the Austro-Hungarian and German side (STA 2017).
- <sup>4</sup> The Kobarid Museum was granted the highest Slovenian museum award in 1992, was nominated for European Museum of the Year in 1993, and received the Council of Europe Museum Prize for 1993 in Strasbourg.

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