

Representations of Regional Identity: A Case Study of the Street Names in Two Neighboring Croatian Regions

Ivana Crljenko

DOI: 10.2436/15.8040.01.184

Abstract

In the northwestern part of the Croatian littoral two regions can be identified. The first one occupies the largest Croatian peninsula (Istria), and the second one is the neighboring region of the Kvarner Bay area, which stretches to the east and southeast of Istria. Although both are small in size (Istria 2950 km², the Kvarner Bay 3270 km²), these regions had different historical developments, which is the major reason for different notions and expressions of regional identity. In that context, Istria is the most regionally oriented part of Croatia, where 4.3% of the total population identified themselves in the sense of regional affiliation (according to the 2001 census data). It is also a part of Croatia that has been exposed to Italian influence during a long period in history, as well as today. Effects of such a historical background can be identified in many ways in everyday life: in using the Italian language in some parts of Istria as the first or the second language, as well as in the greater significance of the local regional party, but also in the urban landscape – in street names (which are bilingual in some, but not all, parts of Istria). The Kvarner Bay region recorded only 0.05% of the total population that claimed regional affiliation: national identity is deeply expressed in supporting national political parties and in the urban toponymy. Therefore, a comparative study of nine mid-range towns along the Kvarner Bay (four towns) and in Istria (five towns) has shown that there is a difference in regional identity expressions in the names of streets and squares. Expectedly, regional identity was more emphasized in those Istrian towns that have been exposed to a greater Italian influence. As opposed to that, street names in the Kvarner Bay towns show a stronger expression of national identity.

Introduction

Street names or urban toponymy are considered to be the object of research of onomasticians, linguists, town planners, political scientists, geographers and experts from other fields of social sciences. By trying to decode their denotative meaning, geographers, notably cultural and political geographers, not only regard street names as a necessary help in orientation, but they also thoroughly ‘read’ their symbolic meaning and the cultural codes inscribed in them (notably landmarks and toponyms). Sometimes they can be deciphered very easily because of their unmistakable, evident and logical nature, but on the other hand, these codes can often be well hidden, and can ambiguously indicate that there are much deeper meanings embedded in them (i.e. connotative meaning). Therefore, to decode those meanings correctly in a broader context, it is probably better to make a comprehensive analysis of all, and not only some, street names in an analyzed town, and even better, to compare the street names of a few neighboring towns. Exactly that was the aim of the research that will be presented in this paper. To be more concrete, an analysis of street names in nine Croatian towns in the region of the Northern Croatian Littoral has been made. The major intention was to decode the connotative meanings they carry. By doing so, it was noticed that the street names are deeply connected with the local and regional geographical elements of the space in which the town originated and has been developing since. Those geographical elements (landmarks and toponyms) appear as very frequent types of street names (e.g. as landmarks: *School Street*, *St. Mary Street* – after the school or the church of St. Mary that is situated on that street, or as toponyms: *Krk Street*, *Cres Street* – after the islands Krk or Cres). It was also noticed that street names are often named after important historical events or are used as an act of commemoration of notable persons, which implicates that the historical development of the town, region or even state can be ‘read’ out of them. Since the official naming process of

public space is largely conducted from the centers of the present political powers, changing street names or leaving some old street names clearly indicates the standpoint of the current political powers towards collective memory inscribed in the urban toponymy. For that reason, one can say that street names have strong political connotations.

Geographical and historical background

The Northern Croatian Littoral is situated in the westernmost part of Croatia, and it occupies about 6000 km². It can be geographically divided into two minor neighboring regions – Istria and the Kvarner Bay region (Kvarner for short). Both these regions differ in their historical-geographical development. Istria is the largest Croatian peninsula and it occupies about 2950 km² of Croatian territory (an additional lesser part of about 350 km² is divided between Slovenia and Italy) (Zupanc, URL 1; Riđanović *et al.*, 1975). The Kvarner region is next to its eastern and southeastern part. It is the region that occupies about 3270 km², and it consists of the coastal part of eastern Istria in the west (about 130 km²), the Velebit littoral in the east, and some of the largest Croatian islands (Krk, Cres, Lošinj, Rab) with many small islands (fig. 1). Administratively, most of Istria is situated within the borders of the County of Istria (fig. 2), while Kvarner represents the southern and western part of the County of Primorje-Gorski kotar (fig. 3).

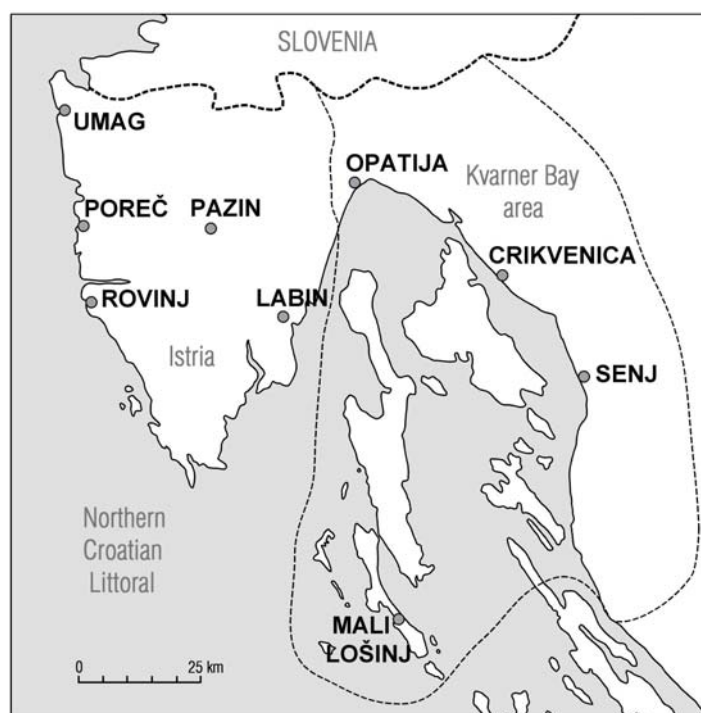


Fig. 1. Northern Croatian Littoral (names of the researched towns are in bold).
Source: Riđanović *et al.*, 1975.



Fig. 2. County of Istria. Source: *Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2009*.



Fig. 3. County of Primorje-Gorski kotar. Source: *Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2009*.

Although both small in size and situated next to each other, these two regions have not shared the same historical development. During Medieval times, and afterwards up to the downfall of the Venetian Republic in 1797, parts of Istria and the Kvarner region came under the authority of the Republic of Venice, and after its fall both regions were part of the large Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. However, historical development was not the same in all parts of Istria as a new entity was formed in central Istria in the 14th century. It was the Pazin principality (*Pazinska knežija*), which was an Austrian part of Istria, because *de facto* it belonged to the Habsburg family. In the 15th century the Venetians ruled in the western, southern, southeastern, and partly in the northwestern part of Istria. In those days the Venetians held three quarters of the peninsula (fig. 4). This political division of the peninsula between the Venetians and the Habsburgs lasted until the fall of the Venetian Republic in the late 18th century (Zupanc, URL 1). After that, all Istria came under Austrian rule. After Napoleon's conquest took place at the beginning of the 19th century, there were many changes of rulers and borders in the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century. Such a turbulent history was actually the direct outcome of the conquest ambitions of the Austro-Hungarian, Italian and German rulers – the latter ones during World War II. Istria as we know it today became part of Croatia not before 1947, with the Trieste area in 1975.

The Kvarner region, on the other hand, was also under the rule of the Venetian Republic during a large part of its history, but it became part of Austro-Hungary earlier than some areas of Istria (e.g. Austro-Hungarian rule was established in Rijeka in the 15th century, and by 1719 it had become an important Austro-Hungarian harbor). Beside the Austro-

Hungarians and the Venetians, from the 12th century onwards many estates in Kvarner were owned by Croatian noblemen (Krk, Senj, Vinodol and so on). In the late 18th century the Venetian estates in Kvarner came under the rule of the Habsburgs, and only a small part of the coastal area (from Rječina to Karlobag) remained in the hands of the Croats. That is why it was named the Croatian Littoral (*Hrvatsko primorje*), and the name was used for a long time. By calling it 'Croatian', the importance of that little piece of Croatian land was emphasized in relation to the rest of Istria and Dalmatia, which were still under the authority of Austria (Riđanović *et al.*, 1975). In the Croatian Littoral, especially in Senj, strong resistance built up against the Venetian and Ottoman endeavor to conquer the region, which eventually escalated into many open battles.

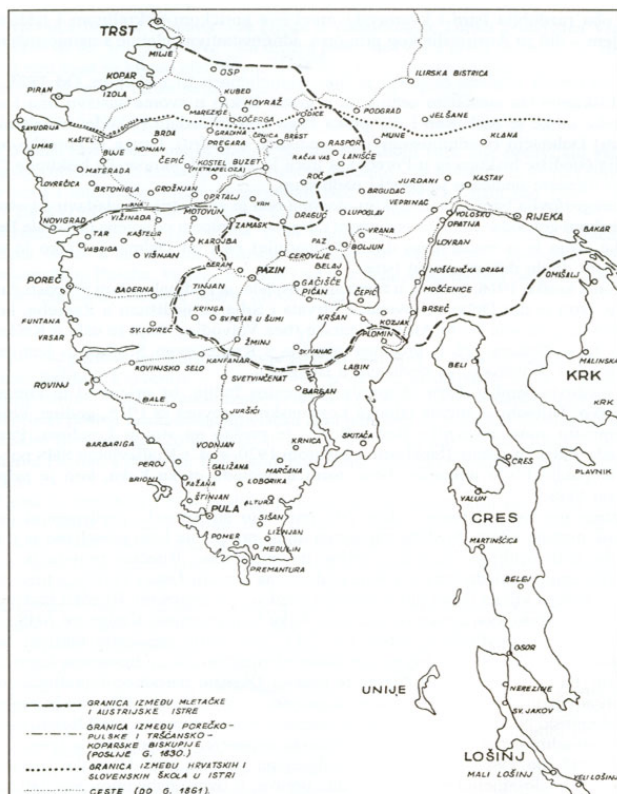


Fig. 4. Istria in the period 1797-1860. Source: Strčić, URL 2.

Regional identity in Istria

In many ways Istria is a specific Croatian region. It is evident in its national compound, as well as in expressing the identity of Istrians. Moreover, some Istrians frequently use the Italian language in everyday life, and give bilingual names to the local toponyms, notably towns (e.g. Umag-Umago, Rovinj-Rovigno, Vodnjan-Dignano, Novigrad-Cittanova, Bale-Valle, Grožnjan-Grisignano, Poreč-Parenzo, and so on). Street names are bilingual in those towns that have been under Italian influence for a long time in history, some of which have a significant Italian minority today (11.4% of Rovinj's inhabitants are Italians, and even 18.3% of the residents of Umag are Italians, according to the 2001 census) (fig. 5). Many Istrians in those areas are also bilingual, and even prefer to speak Italian (often in dialect). Contrary to that, the towns that were once under the Austrian influence have few or no bilingual street names. The specificity of Istria is evident in the process of planned colonization by a population of diverse ethnic background as well.



Fig. 5. Street names in Rovinj (bilingual) and in Pazin (non-bilingual). Photo: I. Crljenko.

Judging by the declaration of national identity in population censuses, the results of political elections, especially those on the local or regional level, or the data collected for the purposes of scientific research, the most widely expressed regional identity in Croatia is the one in Istria, i.e. 'Istrian' identity. As opposed to that, the population in the Kvarner region shows no different affiliation than residents of other Croatian regions in respect of supporting national political parties and declaring themselves about regional identity (in the Kvarner region, only 0.05% of the population declared themselves in respect of regional affiliation, 2001) (fig. 6). The census conducted in 2001 showed that regional affiliation has a significant meaning only in Istria (there were 4.3% of the total Istrian population that defined themselves as 'Istrians' – not Croatians, not members of any minority, but 'Istrians'). The results of the elections held in 1992 and 1993 showed that the population in Istria supported a regional political party, the Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS), to a very significant extent. IDS won 41.3% of the votes in 1992, and even 74.2% in the local election of 1993. In the 1997 election IDS won 46.3%, and in 2001 51.8% of the votes (Banovac, 1998). Scientific research on the level of spatial identity in Istria conducted in early 2000 indicated that 75% of Istrians emphasize the regional level of identity as the dominant one. The second most important level is the one of local identity, and only a minority of Istrians define themselves as Croatians (national level) (Banovac *et al.*, 2004). Summarizing this data we can ask ourselves: why is that so?

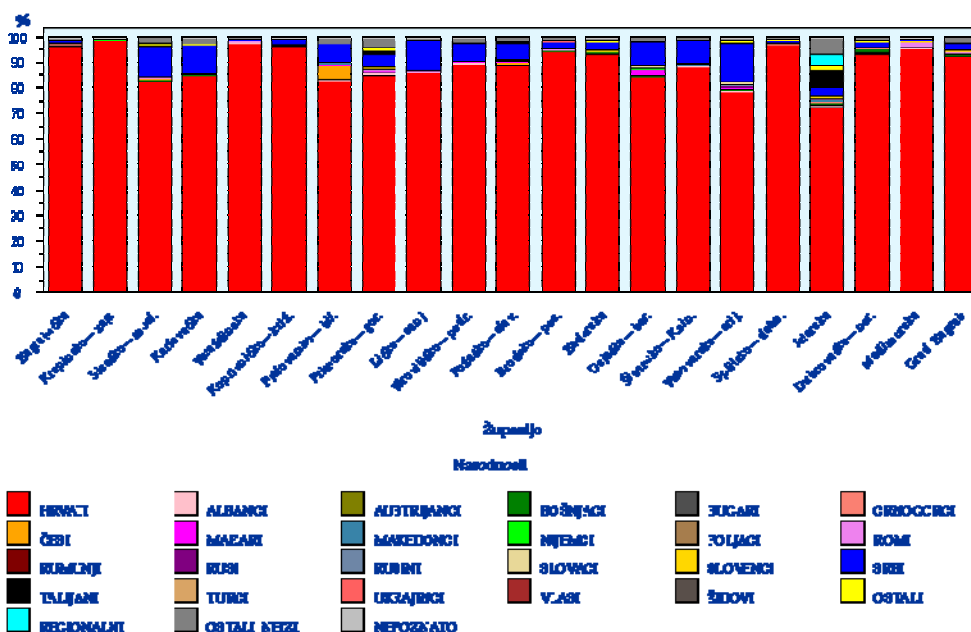


Fig. 6. Population by nationality (census 2001). Source: *Popis stanovništva 2001*, URL 3.

The answer could be that a strong sense of regional identification in Istria has many complex reasons. It is the outcome of its miscellaneous and diverse geographical, historical, political, cultural and economical characteristics, but most importantly, its geographically remote location in the Istrian peninsula. Such a position made Istria a borderland in relation to the rest of Croatian territory, and it was thus a fertile ground for interferences by the three neighboring nations (Croats, Slovenes and Italians) over the course of history. The second reason for the forming of a unique identity is the late addition of Istria to national territory (in the second half of the 20th century), which implicated that the population had to find some inner bonds among themselves during chaotic historical events, instead of making relationships with 'outer' residents, regardless of who they were at the time. Besides, Istria is economically one of the most developed regions in Croatia today (particularly in the tourism industry), so it is not surprising that Istrians have forged close economic relationships with the developed neighboring countries in the west (Italy, Slovenia, Austria, and so on) (Klemenčić *et al.*, 1993; Švaljek, 1995).

Furthermore, historical causes that influenced the appearance and development of regional Istrian identity should be looked for in the social circumstances that predisposed the ethnical structure of Istria in Medieval times, when Istria was divided between Venetian and Austrian rulers (Žuljić, 1994). The political division of the Istrian territory that lasted for centuries, and treating Istria as a region for planned immigration of people of diverse ethnic background (Croats, Italians, Greeks, Albanians, Romanians, Montenegrins and others), had a significant influence on the processes of forming a unique collective identity. Turbulent historical events were marked by conflicts between the Croatian and Italian entities, by separatist ideas of the Italian minority, by national weakening of the Istrian Croats, by fascism, and by planned migrations of Italians from Istria to Italy. The major outcomes of these processes were: strengthening and consolidation of cultural homogenization, forming the feeling of disbelief towards many external political centers that wanted to expand their influence in Istria, as well as towards the rest of the 'external' residents that immigrated later, forming of stronger connections among Istrians and developing the spirit of regional identity embedded in a shared turbulent history. Taking it all into consideration, it is no wonder that national motives are less rooted in the collective identity of Istrians than those based on inner solidarity (Banovac, 1998; Banovac *et al.*, 2004).

In the period after 1950 the feeling of 'uniqueness' and regional individuality has been deepened because of an increased disbelief in the political institutions situated outside Istria and because of the government decision by which overdeveloped parts of ex-Yugoslavia, depending on their level of development, had to give money into a shared fund intended for a faster and more equitable development of the underdeveloped regions. Of course, Istria was the donor region, which made its residents dissatisfied (Žuljić, 1995).

Representations of regional identity in street names

A study of 1024 street names in nine middle-sized towns (population 5000-15000, 2001) in the region of the Northern Croatian Littoral, four of which are located in Kvarner and five in Istria, has indicated that one can rather easily 'read' the national/regional affiliation of the people living there, even if one has in mind that the decisions concerning the naming process are assigned to a small group of experts (the Commission for Naming Streets and Squares), and even if one is aware of the fact that the process of (re)naming streets is in a way a political measure through which government expresses power and authority (Azaryahu and Kook, 2002). The study has showed that all three spatial levels of identity (local, regional and

national) have mostly been represented transparently, with the greatest extent of the ones that carry regional identity (47%). Expectedly, the smallest portion of street names were named after persons or events concerning other countries (6%) (Crljenko, 2008). The largest portion of the street names can be identified as the ones carrying regional and local identity (altogether they make up three quarters of the total number of the analyzed street names), which is entirely understandable. The ‘local’ or ‘regional’ street names (the ones that carry local or regional identity), some of which are often in dialect, represent the desire of citizens to preserve their heritage, their vanishing old names and dialects, to commemorate an important event or a distinguished person, or just to save the memory of a phenomenon, historical document or location that was once important for the later development of a town or region (e.g. *Buje Street*, *Buzet Street*, *Rab Street*) (fig. 7).

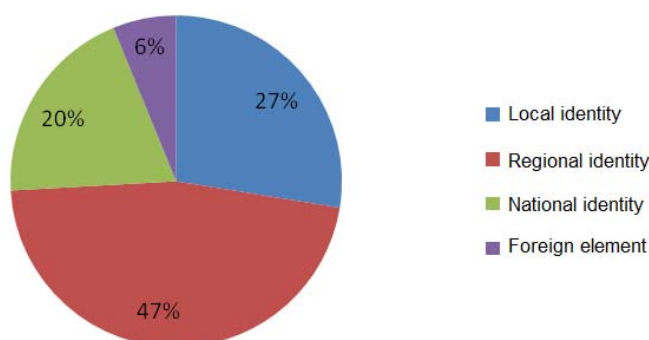


Fig. 7. Expression of identity in street names of all towns.

Similar conclusions can be made when analyzing the distribution of street names in individual towns (fig. 8). First of all, one can notice that the portions of different types of street names (‘local’, ‘regional’ or ‘national’ street names) are very diverse. It is also evident that the frequency of ‘regional’ street names is the highest everywhere but in Mali Lošinj, and that it ranges from 35 to 50% of the total number of street names. ‘Local’ street names follow the ‘regional’ ones, and ‘national’ street names in most towns are least significant. The difference in the expression of regional identity between the Istrian street names and the street names in Kvarner are shown in fig. 9. By counting the standard deviations from the average number of ‘regional’ street names, it has been asserted once again that regional identity in Istria is better expressed, particularly in Rovinj, Poreč and Labin, than the one in the Kvarner region (due to the larger portions of ‘local’ and ‘national’ street names in Kvarner).

Figure 8 reveals that ‘local’ street names are also well represented (in almost all towns they are in second place). The logical explanation is that they directly represent the aspirations of the local community to commemorate important landmarks and notable persons who were born or lived in the community. Here are some examples: *St. Mary Street* (named after the church of Saint Mary), *Fortress Square* (named after the fortress that once stood there), *St. Francis Street* (named after the church of Saint Francis), *Under the Clock Street* (named after the old town clock), *Tower Street* (named after the tower), *School Street* (named after the school which it leads to), *Railway Terminal Street* (named after the railway station which it leads to) and so on. Because of the positive collective memory they carry and because they usually do not have disputable political connotations, ‘local’ street names named after landmarks rarely or never change – they are usually the oldest ones in a town. That is the reason why ‘local’ street names, more than any other type, even more than the ‘regional’ ones, represent the aspirations of the local population to glorify locally important persons and cultural values, i.e. to save and cherish local identity. Exceptions are evident in

the street names of Crikvenica and Poreč, because of the larger portions of ‘national’ street names due to the enforcement of planning policy for naming the streets.

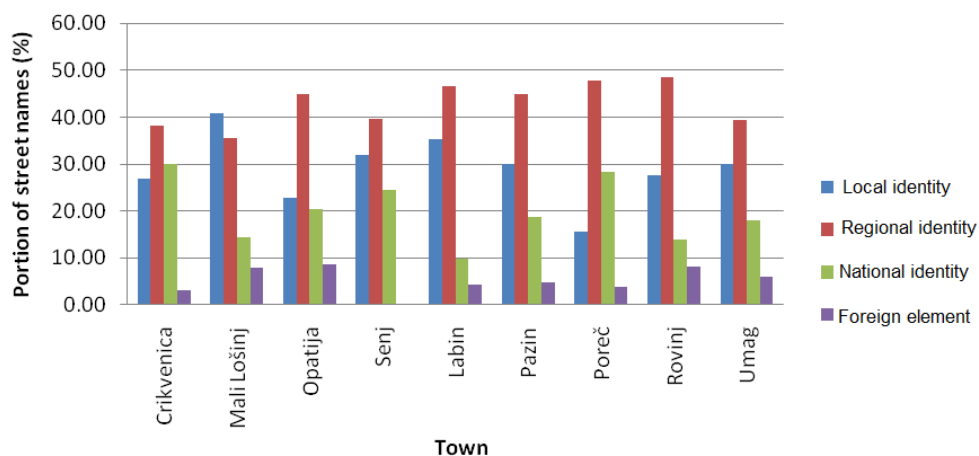


Fig. 8. Expression of identity in street names according to individual towns.

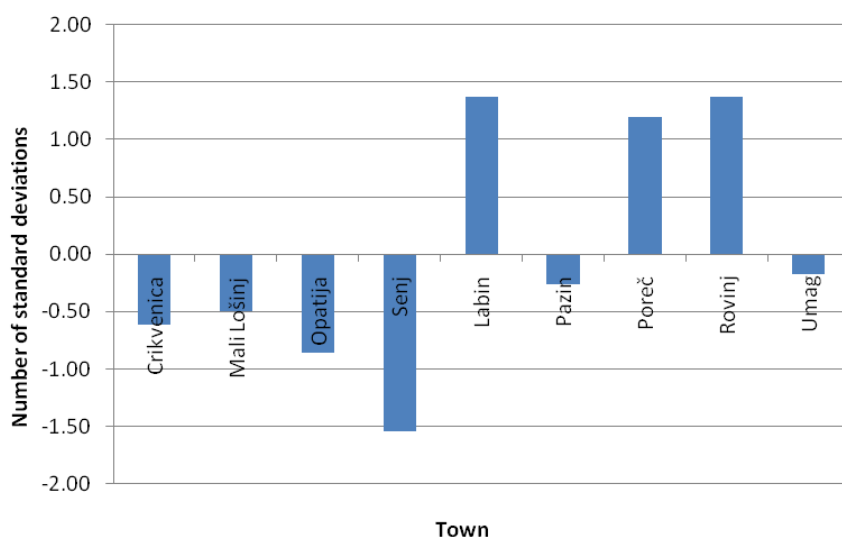


Fig. 9. Deviation of average expression of regional identity in street names.

‘National’ street names like *Republic of Croatia Square*, *Zagreb Street*, *Tito’s Square*, *People’s Rebellion Square*, are mostly ranged in third place, and their portion significantly varies among towns. It certainly has something to do with the fact that other types of street names (‘local’ and ‘regional’), which are usually older, occupy higher portions of the total number of street names, and also with the fact that local communities in smaller towns tend to commemorate locally or regionally important historical events, persons or landmarks by default (if they do not, the residents of other towns probably will not!). Nevertheless, it is evident that street names which represent national identity are more present in the Kvarner region towns (especially in Crikvenica and Senj), while Istrian towns (notably Rovinj and Umag, which were under Italian influence for a long time and have a larger Italian minority today) record a lesser number of ‘national’ street names.

Street names and population by nationality

A comparison of the portions of Croats and the residents that declared themselves in the sense of a regional, not national, identity in the analyzed towns during the 2001 census confirmed the well-known phenomenon of a strong Istrian regional identity once again (Žuljić, 1995; Banovac, 1998; Banovac *et al.*, 2004) (fig. 10). Not only on the regional level, but on the level of individual Istrian towns as well, a higher portion of population with a sense of regional affiliation and a lower portion of Croats have been noticed in comparison to the population of the Kvarner towns. In Labin, for instance, a higher portion of people who defined themselves in the sense of regional identity is the outcome of a larger portion of non-Croatian population, mostly Bosniaks, who migrated to Labin after World War II to become workers in the local coalmine. On the other hand, not a single town in Kvarner has the portion of those with a strong sense of regional affiliation higher than 1%. Moreover, in Senj, which can in a manner of speaking be seen as ‘the most Croatian’ of all the analyzed towns, the portion of Croats is almost 100%. Therefore one can assume that such a strong connection to a regional sense of affiliation in Istria, and on the other hand a significantly lower portion of population that consider themselves ‘more regional and less national’ in Kvarner, has to have some effect on the urban landscape, especially on urban toponymy. It is no surprise that the structure of minorities in Istrian towns shows the highest portion of Italian minority (especially in Rovinj and Umag, as mentioned earlier), except in Labin, populated by many Bosniaks. On the other hand, Serbs represent the highest portion of the minority structure in the Kvarner region towns.

Region	Town	Population by nationality (%)		Regional affiliation (%)	Type of identity expressed in street names (%)	
		Croats	Other nationalities*		National	Regional
Kvarner Bay	Crikvenica	90.02	7.03	0	24.42	30.23
	Mali Lošinj	83.14	12.05	0.05	10.29	30.88
	Opatija	86.85	8.43	0.31	5.15	28.87
	Senj	96.77	2.14	0	6.25	25.00
Total		88.96	7.52	0.11	11.24	28.53
Istria	Labin	67.89	15.61	7.27	1.59	41.27
	Pazin	86.51	3.00	5.07	5.75	32.18
	Poreč	75.40	14.66	3.61	19.40	40.30
	Rovinj	65.94	22.37	5.00	6.94	41.32
	Umag	59.64	31.13	1.57	8.65	32.69
Total		70.44	18.08	4.40	9.02	38.61

Fig. 10. Relationship between street names and population by nationality. Source: *Popis stanovništva 2001*; Crljenko, 2008.

* Other nationalities are all minorities in Croatia that are listed in the census statistics: Albanians, Austrians, Bosniaks, Bulgarians, Montenegrins, Czechs, Hungarians, Macedonians, Germans, Poles, Romani, Romanians, Russians, Rusyns, Slovaks, Slovenes, Serbs, Italians, Turks, Ukrainians, Vlachs, Jews and so on.

By comparing the national compound of population in the selected towns and the expression of a certain level of spatial identity in their street names one can notice some regularities. Namely, in some Kvarner towns, which record a high portion of Croats, ‘national’ street names are present twice as much as in Istrian towns. In Labin, for instance, as well as in Rovinj, the number of ‘regional’ street names is the highest. Expectedly, national identity represented in street names of these two towns is the lowest, which corresponds to the portion of Croats. In Senj, on the other hand, a larger portion of Croats corresponds to a lower number of ‘regional’ street names. As mentioned earlier, national identity inscribed in street

names is strongly expressed in Crikvenica due to a planned naming process. Besides, Crikvenica recorded a high portion of Croats as well.

Conclusion

This study of street names in nine towns of the Northern Croatian Littoral has indicated that street names can be used as a rather accurate indicator of the historical-geographical development of an area. Moreover, the study has pointed out that there is quite a strong correspondence between the national compound of population and their aspiration to represent their national, regional or local identity through urban toponymy. The analysis has also indicated that urban toponymy clearly and rather accurately points out the differences in the representation of national/regional identity in both Istria and Kvarner. The towns in the Kvarner Bay region express a higher level of their citizens' national identification feelings through its street names than those in Istria, which is quite expected, since Istria is identified as the region with the strongest expression of regional identity in Croatia. This is evident not only in street names, but in the population data and election outcomes as well. Therefore, street names in Istrian towns are named after locally or regionally important persons and historical events in higher portion, while a national element is represented in lower portions, notably in those towns that were under Italian influence through many centuries or have a significant Italian minority today. Bilingual street names can also be seen in those towns. Concerning very specific conditions of historical development, with frequent changes of rulers and borders, it is no surprise that the Istrians formed a stronger regional collective identity embedded in a shared turbulent history and stronger inner bonds compared to the towns in the Kvarner Bay region.

References

- AZARYAHU, M.; KOOK, R. 2002. "Mapping the nation: street names and Arab-Palestinian identity: three case studies". *Nations and Nationalism* 8(2), 195-213.
- BANOVAC, B. 1998. *Društvena pripadnost, identitet, teritorij: sociološko istraživanje regionalne pripadnosti u Istri* [Social belonging, identity, territory: Sociological study of regional belonging in Istria]. Rijeka–Opatija: Biblioteka Pravnog fakulteta Sveučilišta u Rijeci.
- BANOVAC, B.; BLAŽEVIĆ, R.; BONETA, Ž. 2004. "Modernizacija (i/ili europeizacija) hrvatske periferije – primjeri Istre, Like i Gorskog kotara" [Modernization (and/or Europeanization) of the Croatian periphery – examples of Istria, Lika and Gorski kotar]. *Revija za sociologiju* 35(3-4), 113-141.
- BERTOŠA, M.; MATIJAŠIĆ, R. (eds) 2005. *Istarska enciklopedija* [Istrian Encyclopedia]. Zagreb: Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža.
- CRLJENKO, I. 2008. "Izraženost identiteta u gradskoj toponimiji kvarnerskih i istarskih gradova" [Expression of identity in urban toponymy of the towns in Kvarner and Istria]. *Hrvatski geografski glasnik* 70(1), 67-90.
- KLEMENČIĆ, M.; KUŠAR, V.; RICHTER, Ž. 1993. "Promjene narodnosnog sastava Istre: prostorna analiza popisnih podataka 1880-1991" [Changes in the ethnical structure of Istria: Census and spatial analyses 1880-1991]. *Društvena istraživanja* 6-7(4-5), 607-629.
- Popis stanovništva 2001. *Statističko izvješće 1166*. 2003. [Census 2001, Statistical Document 1166]. Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku.
- RIĐANOVIĆ, J.; ROGIĆ, V.; ROGLIĆ, J.; ŠEGOTA, T. 1975. *Geografija SR Hrvatske, knj. 5: Sjeverno Hrvatsko primorje* [Geography of SR Croatia, book 5: Northern Croatian Littoral]. Zagreb: Školska knjiga.

- Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske 2009*. 2010. [Statistical Yearbook of the Republic of Croatia 2009]. Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku.
- ŠVALJEK, S. 1995. "Regionalni identitet Istre" [Regional identity of Istria]. *Ekonomski pregled* 46(3-4), 253-262.
- ŽULJIĆ, S. 1994. *Hrvatska Istra: Suvremene narodnosne prilike* [Croatian Istria: Contemporary national situation]. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus.
- ŽULJIĆ, S. 1995. "Regionalizam i narodnosno izjašnjavanje u Istri godine 1991" [Regionalism and determinations of nationality in Istria in 1991]. *Ekonomski pregled* 46(3-4), 277-291.
- URL 1: ZUPANC, I. 2004. *Gdje je Istra?* [Where is Istria?].
<http://www.geografija.hr/clanci/257/gdje-je-istra>, 05/05/2011.
- URL 2: STRČIĆ, P. *Deset značajki povijesti Istre s Pazinom u drugoj polovini 19. i u prvoj polovini 20. stoljeća* [Ten characteristics in history of Istria with Pazin in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century].
http://dobrila.donic.hr/strcic_petar_deset_znacajki_povijesti_istre.html, 05/05/2011.
- URL 3: *Popis stanovništva 2001. Stanovništvo prema narodnosti po županijama* [Census 2001, Population by nationality by counties]. Zagreb: Državni zavod za statistiku.
http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv/censuses/Census2001/Popis/Graphs/narbars_frame.html, 5/05/2011.

Ivana Crljenko
Lexicographical Institute *Miroslav Krleža*
Frankopanska 26
10 000 Zagreb
Croatia
ivana.crljenko@lzmk.hr