

## Article

# Creating Atmosphere and Meaning through Singing on the Religious Pilgrimage from Sali to Piškera

Petra Valovičić

Department of Ethnology and Anthropology, University of Zadar, 23 000 Zadar, Croatia; pvalovici21@unizd.hr

**Abstract:** The Catholic pilgrimage from Sali (island of Dugi Otok, Croatia) to the island of Piškera is embedded in the historical connections between these two locations, as Piškera was inhabited by fishermen from Sali for nearly three centuries. While sailing through the archipelago that no longer belongs to them, the pilgrims from Sali sing. During Mass, they perform a sung liturgy rooted in polyphonic folk singing; after Mass, the singing usually continues up until they depart. In this article, I argue that this community embodies its presence in the archipelago and creates a certain atmosphere through singing, while simultaneously inscribing meaning into the pilgrimage itself.

**Keywords:** Sali; Piškera; pilgrimage; singing; ritual; atmosphere; meaning making

## 1. Introduction

During my initial field research in 2021<sup>1</sup>, conversations regarding the pilgrimage often included phrases like *wait until they start singing...* or *you'll see when the singing begins...* However, I did not attribute much importance to such statements until the actual pilgrimage took place. In that year, due to the pandemic, only a few small boats and logistical vessels set sail from Sali village, on the island of Dugi otok. After nearly three hours of navigating the Kornati archipelago—which territorially belonged to Sali until recently—we arrived at Piškera cove on a small uninhabited island with only a few structures, a church, and a seasonal restaurant. With several smaller boats already moored at the pier, the overall atmosphere was remarkably relaxed, almost like an ordinary summer excursion. Shortly after our arrival, at around 11 AM, everyone gathered in the shade of a pine tree, forming a short procession while singing and walking toward the Catholic Church of Little Mary, where they would hold Mass. As the liturgy commenced and the initial sung passages filled the space, I had a strong physical reaction of gooseflesh. The church space resonated with the predominantly male voices of the pilgrims performing *Saljska pučka misa* (Sali folk Mass). The powerful sound of technically precise and aesthetically pleasing singing was especially pronounced during the song *Gospe ribara težaka* (Our Lady of Fishermen Labourers), which was performed towards the very end. As the singing filled the church space, my physical reaction was accompanied by an emotional one. Overwhelmed with feeling and with tears in my eyes, I glanced around and saw that I was not the only one deeply moved by the performance.

After the Mass concluded, everyone headed to lunch. Some went to the restaurant on the bay, and some to their boats. Shortly after the meal, the pilgrims from the boats began to make their way to the restaurant and started to sing. Upon reaching the restaurant terrace, I encountered mostly men standing in a circle and singing. Interrupted only by short breaks in order to select the next song or key, or to refill glasses, the singing continued for the next few hours. These songs were not religious but had a popular character, all praising life tied to the sea, and were performed with the same aesthetics, energy, and enthusiasm as the liturgy had been, and produced a similar overwhelming effect.

Immersed in the atmosphere and my own sensory experiences during the initial fieldwork, I prioritised the performative aspects of this pilgrimage. Revived in 1993, this



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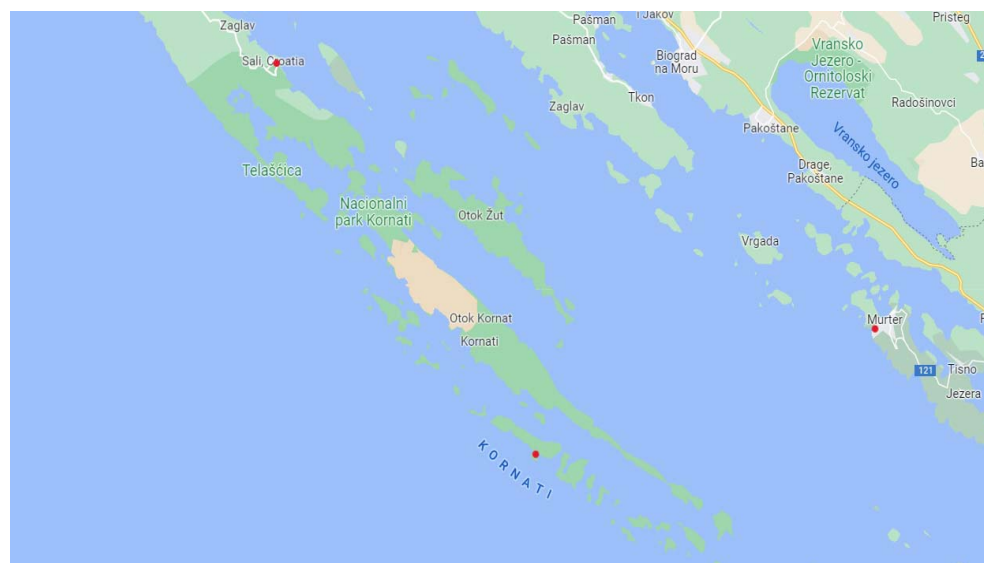
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pilgrimage seems to be rooted in the historical relationship between the Sali community and the fishery, a relationship anchored in their former fishing settlement at Piškera. Piškera cove is located on the island of Jadra, 22 nautical miles from Sali, which is part of the Kornati archipelago (Figure 1). Positioned toward the midpoint of the archipelago with a cove facing the open sea but sheltered by the islet of Vela Panitula, Jadra provided the 16th-century fishermen from Sali a much-needed safe harbour within their fishing area of the Kornati archipelago. According to Filipi (1968), the fishermen of Sali founded a settlement by building a few simple houses and fishing storehouses. By the year 1560, through their contributions, they had built a church dedicated to the Little Mary. The Piškera settlement on Jadra was abandoned in the late 19th century, but its significance to the people of Sali is manifold. One of the benefits it provided was the exclusive right to fish within the waters of the Kornati archipelago, which they enjoyed from the 16th until the mid-20th century (Basioli 1963; Skračić 2001). According to fieldwork, apart from Piškera, the people of Sali also used fields on the island of Kornat, that have until recently belonged administratively and territorially to Sali. Today, most of the archipelago is under the jurisdiction of Murter and is privately owned by the people of Murter. Except for a few private holdings, the sole property owned by the community of Sali is the Little Mary Church, administered by the Parish of Sali. In addition to forming a geographic entity, Dugi Otok (specifically its southeastern part) and the Kornati archipelago constituted the economic, social, and cultural entity of Sali. As the power dynamics between the two communities (Sali and Murter) inhabiting the archipelago were altered by political, economic, and social changes, this entity disintegrated.



**Figure 1.** Map of the Kornati archipelago with marked locations of Sali, Piškera, and Murter. Google Maps screenshot, created by the author.

Derived from the mentioned historical, cultural, and theological elements and intertwined with the Little Mary Church, this pilgrimage symbolism distinctly designates Piškera as its focal point. However, during the voyage, the historical, economic, and cultural context, along with the complex relationships that emerge from geographical and specific administrative conditions of the space in which it takes place, becomes evident as it intertwines with singing. Thus, while observing it through the lens of Brown's (2003) concept of "ritual performance", I contextualise the unfolding pilgrimage within its contemporary setting. I argue that within this pilgrimage, knowledge, shared history, and the experience of being in the archipelago are channelled through singing, thereby considering music as the performative aspect of this pilgrimage. Starting from Merriam's assumption that "music is interrelated with the rest of culture; it can and does shape, strengthen, and

channel social, political, economic, linguistic, religious, and other kinds of behaviour” (Merriam 1964, p. 15), I observe singing within the context of the pilgrimage as a ritual practice determined by its location (Turner and Turner 1978) and movement (Morinis 1992), specifically the boat journey to the pilgrimage site.

My intention in this article is to discuss singing during the pilgrimage through the case study of the group of pilgrims that I refer to as “pivači” (the singers). I consider that the performance of *Saljska pučka misa* (Sali folk Mass) at Piškera church can be observed as performing “the past as present” (Bohlman 1996, p. 434), a pilgrims’ affirmation of the continuity of their claim to Piškera. Further, I argue that by singing at certain other locations in the archipelago, this group embodies their presence within it and inscribes itself in the space of the archipelago. In that sense, I assume its “cultural repository” (Morinis 1992) goes beyond fishery, and its centre is much wider than Piškera cove church. Therefore, my assumption is that, even though it appears to arise from the historical reminiscence of this community’s long fishing tradition and identity, this pilgrimage is, in fact, rooted in the community’s relationship with the space of the archipelago. By proposing that by singing this group transforms the secular space of the archipelago into the pilgrimage sacred periphery, I argue that singing is a means of creating cultural meanings and forms a constitutive element of this pilgrimage.

I will commence by providing a comprehensive overview of my research methodology and the procedures involved in gaining access to the field site. Subsequently, I will delve into contextualizing the pilgrimage within its historical, political, and social milieu. This will be followed by theoretical frameworks and an examination of the significance of singing and its role in the performative aspects of the pilgrimage.

## 2. Methodology

This ongoing research began in 2021 with preliminary investigations into the geographical, historical, and cultural context of the community and the pilgrimage. Quite early on, it became evident that the complexity and multi-layered nature of the field would determine its course and focus. The material obtained during the research is based on interviews with pilgrims and other community members, discussions, informal conversations before, during, and after the pilgrimage, as well as participant observation and mapping.

The COVID-19 pandemic was still ongoing during the first year of research, and social gathering restrictions, although not strict, did affect the pilgrimage of this small island community. That year, the large boat did not set sail for Piškera, so only those pilgrims who had their own small boats went on the pilgrimage, along with a few outsiders like me. There were only about 60 people on the pilgrimage, and most of them happened to belong to the group of singers. Considering the context in which the pilgrimage takes place and the fact that it was my first experience in the field, I tried to maintain certain focuses, but most of these faded into the background with the first sounds of the sung liturgy. Given my musical education and experience in singing, the technical precision of the polyphonic singing is something I noticed from the very first bars of the liturgy. As the stone walls of the church further accentuated the resounding performance consisting of predominantly male vocals, my physical and emotional response confused me. Although raised in a Catholic family, I have not practiced the faith for many years now. Nevertheless, the physical and emotional stimuli provoked by the pilgrims’ singing were so powerful that they completely overwhelmed me, sent shivers down my spine, and brought me to tears. I believe the trigger of my reaction was the aesthetics of the pilgrims’ singing, which I perceived as technically precise, a resounding singing that filled the space, performed with attention paid to varying the nuances of volume and intensity; the singing performance that conveys certain emotions and thus provokes physical and emotional reactions in participants and listeners (Gatt 2018). Later, during the afternoon session carried by the same aesthetics, I joined the group and their singing. As I joined the singing performance of the group, mostly composed of older men who knew each other well, I transitioned from the role of an observing researcher to an active participant. The act of physically approaching the

singers and engaging in the singing created a sense of acceptance and welcome among the community members. Known participants willingly shared their feelings and thoughts, and even those I had not met before approached me for introductions and expressed a desire for further communication. Subtle nonverbal cues throughout the day contributed to a sense of belonging. During subsequent fieldwork, I realised my participation in singing provided me with direct access and entry not only to the group of singers, but also to the broader pilgrim community. This led to a change in my status within the field; with each subsequent visit, members of the group of singers made themselves available for interviews and mapping, often freeing time from their own obligations.

During subsequent visits, I focused on the newfound interlocutors, for whom the pilgrimage to Piškera involves a three-day journey through the archipelago, denoted as “the singers”. Established during our moments of singing together during the pilgrimage, the relationship between us allowed me to enter new spheres of conversation. Although it brought a new level of entry into the community of singers, access was still not complete as I was not allowed to participate in their three-day pilgrimage. Since it involves sailing through the archipelago on very small private boats, none of them agreed to take me. The excuses were various, from the size of the boat and its cramped space, the inconvenience of not having sanitary facilities, discomfort, or lack of sleeping space, to gender-related excuses. Even though they were aware of my research role and the need to participate in their pilgrimage, they did not accept taking me along. Despite a high level of acceptance, my gender and status of an outsider formed boundaries that are firm and non-negotiable. These boundaries only affirmed my interest in the singers and the importance of the pilgrimage for them, so I decided to approach them through mapping (Figure 2). Members of this group marked the pilgrimage route on a blank map of the Kornati archipelago, indicating the places they stopped and where they engaged in singing. Here I employ what Mahajan terms “archipelagic ethnography”, a method adept at “simultaneously hold the particularity of spaces whilst drawing them in relation to each other” (Mahajan 2021, p. 10). Drawing on Pugh’s (2016) concept of a relationality that is performed, envisioned, and consequently, summoning a particular past into the present, she situates relationality at the core of this ethnographic method, emphasizing the significance of integrating “memory and histories of mobility across these spaces” (Mahajan 2021, p. 15).

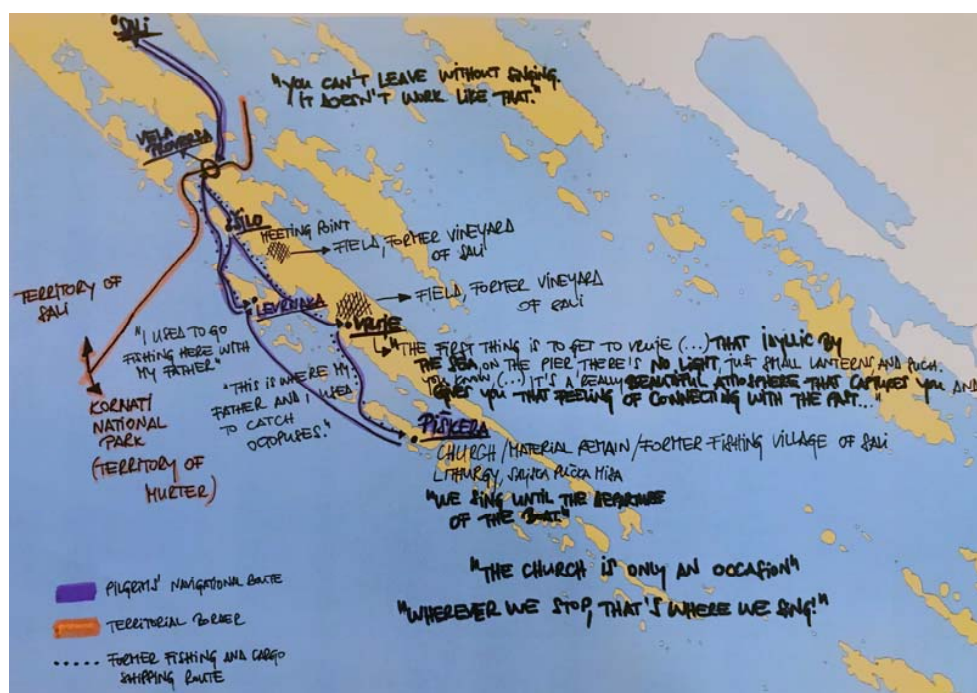


Figure 2. Mapping singers’ navigational route, 2023. Created by the author.



The aim of mapping was to collect data on the appearance and unfolding of this practice, providing insight into the pilgrims' experiences and the meanings they attribute to it. It aimed to capture aspects that may not be fully expressed during interviews, particularly related to the experiential perception of the journey, the space, and the singing. By recording conversations during mapping, I later extracted and mapped segments where participants described the space and their relationship with it. This process offered insights into how this community perceives, determines, and defines the space of the archipelago. It enabled me to gain a comprehensive understanding of the researched practice as experienced by those who participate, shedding light on the meanings embedded in the archipelago's space. Adopting a phenomenological approach, I centred on participants' experiences to transcend the conventional boundaries of perceiving pilgrimage and singing. This approach seeks to delve into the subjective experiences of the participants, unravelling their motives and actions. Acknowledging the substantial impact of sensory and emotional stimuli during my initial fieldwork, I recognize that the focus of this paper has arisen from my personal experiences and perceptions of the atmosphere surrounding this pilgrimage. Gatt discusses how "attentional practices grow different knowing bodies", meaning that "how we set out to know the atmospheres in the first place contributes both to the conceptual *and* physical perceptual apparatuses available for one's enquiry" (Gatt 2018, p. 136). Consequently, I employ sensory ethnography, incorporating my own experiential encounters and elements of autoethnographic reflexivity linked to my sensory experiences during the research.

### 3. The Kornati Archipelago, the Pilgrimage, and "the Singers"

The historical connection between the Sali community and Piškera dates to the 16th century when a new fishing approach facilitating deep-sea fishing emerged. As the people of Sali utilised the archipelago space, they became workers employed by the Zadar nobility, who were invested in fishing (Basioli 1963). Faced with the uncertainties of the deep sea, which necessitated a safe harbour, Sali's fishermen settled in the naturally secure bay on the island of Jadra, constructing the first structures around 1532. With fishing gaining economic significance and drawing the attention of the state, the Venetian Republic initiated tax collection, construction of houses, warehouses, and docks, ultimately transforming this displaced fishing settlement into a crucial fishing base for the Zadar Commune (Filipi 1968) (Figure 3). During this period, inhabited almost exclusively by fishermen from Sali, the settlement and its surrounding area was known as *Peschiera di Zara* (Zadar's fish farm). The church built above the settlement in 1560 by the fishermen, using their own resources, stands as another testament to the rapid development and significance of fishery for this community. Apart from employment and the exclusive right to use the waters of the Kornati archipelago granted by the Venetian Republic, Sali reaped a substantial infrastructural benefit—the port, current administrative, cultural, and social hub of Sali. With the expansion of the fishery, the port grew, and the relocation of the customs office in the 19th century turned it into a centre of power, leading to the abandonment of the *Peschiera* settlement.

Despite the various challenges and fluctuations, the fishing industry in Sali has persisted to the present day. A crucial factor in its longevity was the establishment of the Mardešić fish processing plant, which opened in 1907 due to the proximity of the Kornati archipelago and the presence of skilled fishermen. This plant not only provided fishermen with a more reliable income source but also created job opportunities for the island's population, contributing to the broader development of Sali and the entire northeastern part of the island. In recent years, issues such as the mismanagement of marine and coastal resources have led to a stagnation of Sali's fishing industry, a trend mirrored along the entire coast. However, the fish processing plant still employs a certain portion of the local population, and while fewer people are directly involved in fishing today, some engage in it as one of several activities, either to meet their basic needs or simply for enjoyment. Therefore, influenced by the immediate proximity of the archipelago, fishing has played a significant role in shaping this community on multiple levels. Even though the majority of

the population is engaged in tourism-related activities, fishing still maintains a presence in both the physical space of Sali and the daily life of the community.



**Figure 3.** Display of the former settlement of Piškera on cadastral maps from 1824. Source: Arcanum Adatbázis Kft (2021). Cadastral maps (<https://maps.arcanum.com/en/map/cadastral>, accessed on 23 September 2023).

Prompted by the initiative of a priest from Sali, the church in Piškera was cleaned in 1992, and the first pilgrimage to *the Queen of Fishermen* took place in 1993, during the Homeland war. Since then, every year on the last Saturday in July, pilgrims from Sali sail to Piškera to worship at their *Fisherman's Cathedral*. Although it remains uncertain whether the pilgrimage itself existed earlier, the local community designates the year 1993 as the period of its revival. According to the literature, the last service in this church was held in the year 1939, after which it briefly served as a hospital during World War II and was then abandoned until the pilgrimage occurred. When asked if the pilgrimage as such existed before or to place it in a timeline, my interlocutors' responses were vague and consisted mostly of their ancestors' reminiscences of going to Piškera and holding a Mass for the Feast of the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. Organised in the middle of the Homeland war, according to my interlocutors, the pilgrimage was greatly aided by factory Mardešić. The plant organised boats and meals for pilgrims until the late 1990s when, as a result of economic reforms in Croatia, it underwent privatisation. Since then, the pilgrimage has been organised by the church, Nature Park Telašćica, and Sali municipality. Even though both pilgrimage designations evoke Sali's illustrious fishing past, implying the uncertainties and hardships of a fisherman's life, as well as Christian values, these terms were rarely used by my interviewees. They commonly referred to the pilgrimage as the *pilgrimage to Piškera* or simply *Piškera*. Derived from the phrase *Peschiera di Zara*, the present-day toponym denotes the bay, the island of Jadra, and the pilgrimage. This indicates both the importance of the location and its economic, social, and cultural significance within the community of Sali. Today, the island of Jadra belongs to the territory of the municipality of Tisno (Murter) and Šibenik-Knin County and is a part of Kornati National Park. Although most of its land is privately owned by the people of Murter, the Church of Little Mary, along with its access road, belongs to the Parish of Sali, making it the only material remnant of the former fishing settlement (Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Aerial photograph of Piškera Bay. Author: Assoc. Prof. Ante Blaće, Ph.D., collaborator on the PILGRIMAR project.

Even though the origins of this division date back to the 17th century when people from Murter settled on the archipelago's pastures as Zadar's nobility herdsmen (Skračić 2001), its complete execution took place only after World War II. As land did not mean much to the fishermen, who retained the right to use the sea, Murter residents acquired large plots of land during the decline of the nobility in the 19th century and gradually became the majority landowners on the islands. Given the historical absence of a defined legal framework governing the status of the sea, the rights to utilisation were dependent on the interests of the state. Within this context, the interests of the Sali fishermen, who regularly employed the waters of the archipelago, aligned with those of the state, consequently establishing their entitlement to access and utilise the sea (Basioli 1963; Skračić 2001). Legally, fishermen did not need to own property on the shoreline to have the right to exploit the sea until the first half of the 19th century, when the Marine Fishing Act was enacted. As the two biggest islands of the archipelago still belonged to the municipality of Sali, their fishermen still had exclusive access to its waters. However, in the mid-20th century, after the end of World War II, as new territorial divisions were determined within the borders of Yugoslavia, the entire Kornati archipelago was assigned to Murter, i.e., to the Šibenik district, granting the people of Murter the right to fish in its coastal waters (Skračić 2001). This ended the dominance of Sali's fishermen. Further on, the historically grounded right to govern the waters of the archipelago slipped entirely from their hands as the sea was defined as a public good, belonging to everyone, and the final blow occurred in the 1980s when the entire Kornati archipelago was declared a National Park. Even though it initially included the southeastern part of Dugi Otok, in 1988, the protected area was split along the border between the municipalities of Sali and Tisno (Murter). This act created Telaščica Nature Park in the southeastern part of Dugi Otok, while the rest of the archipelago retained its National Park status. The strict legislative regulations of the National Park, which prohibit fishing, led to Sali fishermen discontinuing any fishing activities within the archipelago. Consequently, the Kornati archipelago ceased to be Sali's community resource as well as social and cultural unit. The evolving division of the archipelago, shaped by the mentioned changes, has brought a shift in power dynamics between these two communities, resulting in evident animosity across various levels, particularly in the cultural domain.



When we arrived to Piškera in 2021, there was nothing to suggest that this practice was of exceptional importance to this community. A photo taken at the time clearly shows that the church interior had been stripped of any decorations, and the pilgrims were dressed in simple, everyday summer clothes (Figure 5). However, the information that can be gleaned from the photograph is at complete odds to what was experienced. What seemed like an everyday, completely ordinary situation changed entirely as soon as the first parts of the sung liturgy were performed. In the semi-filled church built from plain stone walls, and devoid of ornamentation, the pilgrims began to sing the liturgy loudly and confidently. Their thunderous singing was enveloping, with the beginning of every new sequence seamlessly merging with the echo of the previous one and filling the partly empty church space with sound, up to the point where it could nearly be physically touched and sensed.



**Figure 5.** The interior of the church during the pilgrimage liturgy. Photo taken by the author.

As I later learned, pilgrims performed *Saljska pučka misa*, the sung liturgy that *has always been sung in this church* (in Sali) (Interlocutor 2) and is rooted in Glagolitic singing, “a distinct Slavic, Croatian Roman Rite folk church singing style, which developed in the Croatian coastal regions from Istria to southern Dalmatia, including the islands. In a broader sense, Glagolitic singing encompasses all liturgical, paraliturgical, and religious singing performed by priests and laypeople (soloists and groups). It originated from church singing in the Church Slavonic language, which already included church singing in the living Croatian vernacular language in the Middle Ages” (Čaleta 2014, p. 263). Even though, until quite recently, *the solemn Mass of Sali was sung every Sunday* (Interlocutor 2), it is nowadays performed only on major holidays such as Christmas, or on important days in the community’s Catholic calendar.

*Although the rest of the church community knows how to sing these chants* (Interlocutor 2), the bearers of the sung liturgy are active members of the church choir, for *someone always needs to lead. . . someone who can do it properly* (Interlocutor 2). At Piškera, few other pilgrims also join the choir members in bearing the sung liturgy. *I’m not much of a religious person; I just love to sing and socialise (. . .) but at Piškera, I attend Mass to sing, if there’s a need to help with singing. . .* (Interlocutor 3). Together they form a group whom I refer to as *pivači* (the singers). This is a community of around 15 elderly men, all islanders living in Sali for whom the pilgrimage to Piškera carries immense significance. *It (the pilgrimage) lasts for three days for our team, and for us, that’s everything! This is a team of about ten, fifteen boats that have been going there ever since it started. . . We look forward to the Piškera pilgrimage throughout the entire year, eagerly awaiting the moment when we can set sail* (Interlocutor 1). Although



heterogeneous and consisting mainly of devout individuals with varying religious views, they all share the same motivation for embarking on this journey—singing.

*Music always draws us in. It starts and ends with music (. . .) This is a church festival and an event, and then this crowd comes, and the most significant impression in all of this is just the singing. (Interlocutor 4)*

*The church is just the reason to start. But these rituals and songs, well. . . the church and the Mass are, you know, the cause for it all. (Interlocutor 5)*

During my first fieldwork, while singing in the afternoon, they started each song with serious facial expressions that soon changed into expressions of bliss. As everyone sings well, they paid attention to the performance to be technically accurate and aesthetically pleasing so *it all resonates, and it sends shivers down your spine* (Interlocutor 2), as it did. During this session, as I joined in singing with the same enthusiasm, and hopefully matching accuracy and aesthetics, they welcomed me into their temporary community, allowing me to discover and research *their* pilgrimage. I noticed how, with certain songs, they exchanged places with one another, indicating their familiarity with each other's vocal abilities, and how they combine them differently in various songs. This led me to assume that this group has been singing together for quite a long time, a hypothesis that was confirmed during the subsequent interviews. *We always sing. We're a group. . . Always, for holidays, celebrations, baptisms, we sing. . . Our group gets together like this a few times a year, we all gather, go to a tavern, and sing the entire evening. . . In the past, we used to sing all the time. On Sundays, for example, in the afternoon, we'd go to someone's house and sing. But that tradition hasn't happened anymore in the last 10, 15 years. Now we sing for holidays, celebrations, and when our group gets together* (Interlocutor 6). In that sense, for this group singing is an essential act of socialisation and cohesion.

Even though for most pilgrims, the journey to Piškera is a one-day practice, for the singers, it is a three-day pilgrimage during which they sail in small private boats through the Kornati archipelago, where they *catch fish, and sing*. Their journey through the archipelago embarks on Friday, when they gather at the islet of Šilo, located in the north part of Kornati National Park, from where they sail together towards Vruje, the largest settlement of Murter municipality in the archipelago. There, they stop to spend the night by the pier, singing songs into the evening. *The first thing is to get to Vruje, it's always been in Vruje so far. We have guitars, we have an accordion, there are 20, 30 of us. . . sometimes more, sometimes less, and then you just enjoy it as much as you can. . . because it's like that, idyllic, by the sea, on the pier, there's no light, just small lanterns, and so on. You know (. . .) it's a really beautiful atmosphere that captures you and gives you that feeling of connecting with the past* (Interlocutor 4). Early the next morning, their voyage continues towards Piškera, where, after Mass and the afternoon gathering, they stay in bay and spend the evening singing. On Sunday, they make one more stop, usually in Proversa, that is the location of territorial demarcation, where they sing once more before entering Sali harbour. The participants find this three-day pilgrimage to be an incomparable *sense of community, singing, praising God* (Interlocutor 2).

#### 4. Theoretical Frameworks

Drawing on the principles of Merriam's (1964) concept of "music as a social process" that "shapes, reinforces, and channels social, political, economic, linguistic, religious, and other actions" (Merriam 1964, p. 15), and can thus provide insights into community perspectives and behaviours, I observe music within the context of the unfolding pilgrimage. In defining pilgrimage within this paper, I rely on the theoretical approach of Turner and Turner (1978), which draws on the concept of ritual, and that proposed by Morinis (1992), which focuses on the individual experience of the act of the pilgrimage itself. The Turners emphasise that as pilgrimages are inscribed by the everyday lives and attitudes of pilgrims, and thus shaped by political, social, and economic processes, they must be observed within the context of the time in which they originate and take place (Turner and Turner 1978). They argue that what motivates pilgrims to undertake long journeys to pilgrimage

sites “is not the structure of founding narratives (...) but the historical, theological, and phenomenological aspects of stories that affirm the validity and efficacy of pilgrimage, with each narrative being exceptionally condensed and multivocal, functional on several levels of meaning” (Turner and Turner 1978, p. 47). Defining symbols as a semantic arena of numerous signs originating from various temporal, political, cultural, and many other periods and influences, they argue that the dynamic interaction between the emotional and the cognitive is supported by pilgrimage symbolism, emphasising that this relationship can be further intensified by ritual topography that emerges from pilgrimage cultural landscape. In that sense, Turner and Turner emphasise its relationship towards the pilgrimage centre and its transformative character. Further defining it as a ritual practice, they state that it reveals major classifications, categories, and contradictions in cultural processes. In these terms, they see it as a liminoid phenomenon characterised by *communitas*, a relational feature of entirely immediate communication, even fellowship, between defined and determined identities, the immediate fellowship within which there is no unification of identity, but rather a temporal liberation from social structures (Turner and Turner 1978).

Focusing on motivations and the pilgrimage act itself, Morinis (1992) observes pilgrimages through the analysis of the symbols, social forces, ideas, behaviours, and experiences interwoven into the practice. Emphasizing the individual experience as the focal point of the practice, he is holding it crucial to concentrate on the “subtle distribution of power and political control involved in the movement of diverse people to ceremonial centers and their dispersion back to local peripheries” (Morinis 1992, p. 45). In that sense, he claims that research should focus on the pilgrimage process, the religious movement as an expression of transcendence. Morinis defines sacred as “the quest for an ideal that may or may not be a deity, defining sacred travel” (Morinis 1992). The pursuit of holiness is determined here by the values and ideals of a specific culture embodied in the sanctuary’s deity, thereby characterizing pilgrimage centres as repositories of cultural ideals. Identifying the quest for this ideal as the primary characteristic of pilgrimages, Morinis determines pilgrimages as “sacred journeys” and underscores their spatial dimension. Utilizing the categories of multidimensional space, journey, and destination as common denominators for all pilgrimages, and considering the movement across diverse experiences to be the “key process of pilgrimage,” he argues that pilgrimages function as an oppositional mediator, enabling the overcoming of diverse obstacles. Therefore, they can be seen as a representation of transformation towards a state of perfection (Morinis 1992).

Hence, I define pilgrimage as ritual practise determined by its location (Turner and Turner 1978) and movement (Morinis 1992). Since ritual practise is inherently performative, I observe it through its processuality. Here, I rely on Brown’s (2003) concept of “ritual performance”, a theoretical framework focused on the experiential aspect of pilgrimages that arises from the experiences of those who participate in them. Drawing on Turner’s (1986) understanding of culture as a process, and considering the definition of rituals as limiting, Brown emphasises performance while identifying performative practices as “conceptual spaces”; specifically, these are forms of human action that emerge between what is prescribed by the script and what happens during the performance when the script takes centre stage in cultural action (Brown 2003, p. 5). Within this concept, he creates space for the consideration of rituals as sites of cultural production.

Starting from a premise similar to that of Turner and Turner, Merriam emphasises the significance of context in the process of reflection. He posits that music, when distilled to its core, takes on symbolic significance, becoming a reflection of society’s fundamental principles, sanctions, and inherent values. By emphasising the symbolic essence of music, Merriam suggests that it plays a crucial role in conveying and embodying the core aspects of a community’s identity within a given cultural and societal context. Specifically, he contends that music serves as a lens through which one can gain insight into the perspectives and behaviours of a community (Merriam 1964). Further, Blacking describes music as a “metaphorical expression of feelings”, and argues it offers a representation of cognitive facts typical not only of objective experiences, but also of the awareness of them (Blacking

1969, p. 39). In that sense, the capacity of music to express and influence emotions makes it “primarily sensory and non-referential” (Blacking 1969, p. 39), thus enabling the communication of ideas and emotions not expressed in conventional discourse. This ability to simultaneously express values and emotions makes it a means of communicating sensations associated with the experience of the sacred, divine, and transcendental, and thus an essential part of religious rituals. Incorporated in religious ceremonies, music is often used as a tool to manage emotions, to instil a sense of reverence, elevation, and solemnity, and to sensitise participants to the messages that are conveyed through prayers and ceremonies (Finnegan 2003). Considering the fact that music can communicate unspoken ideas and concepts, including those “beyond language” (Pink 2015), any song can become a pilgrimage song if it holds significance for the current group and facilitates the sharing of the pilgrimage experience with others through subsequent performances (Taylor 2021). While music plays a crucial role in the context of pilgrimages, most scientific approaches generally focus on the functional roles music plays in shaping or achieving the goals of pilgrimages, or on music as an object (Wood 2018). Many studies highlight music as a catalyst for constructing meaning and fostering a sense of community among pilgrims, which is certainly a typical feature of pilgrimages worldwide (Taylor 2021; Turner and Turner 1978). However, music also holds broader implications, for example, in understanding the processes involved in pilgrimages (Wood 2018) and can thus be viewed as a tool for exploring the cultural and social contexts from which it emerges. In that sense, I observe singing as an essential part of this pilgrimage experience.

Considering the context of this pilgrimage, I draw on Bohlman’s claim that pilgrims create meaning by singing and ascribe political significance to the pilgrimage. By referring to political and linguistic boundaries, as well as sound’s ability to encompass space and “not obey boundaries”, he considers singing a means by which “the pilgrim makes his/her world through the performance of song and charts his/her way through the world with music’s narrativity” (Bohlman 1996, p. 429). He therefore argues that singing old songs in places of new territorial divisions during pilgrimages allows pilgrims to “perform the past as present” (Bohlman 1996). Drawing on Bohlman’s work, Barush states that singing is a means of creating “community with those who have been here in the past”, where encountering “a landscape, a song, or an object that brings about a sense of connection with God, with their ancestors, with Saints” is considered the foundation of creating a shared experience (Barush 2021, p. 52). Furthermore, in re-evaluating the impact of musical practice on shaping the concept of place from the perspectives of those actively engaged in the practice, Greene critically examines the “assumptions about place and places that have led to long-standing cultural misunderstandings” (Greene 2003, p. 205). By underscoring the significance of community performances and rehearsals as pivotal occasions fostering social interaction and community cohesion, he emphasises that music plays a dual role. It serves not only as an integral component of pilgrimage rituals but also as a foundational element in shaping social dynamics (Greene 2003).

Starting from Throop’s (Throop 2015 in Gatt 2018) definition of atmosphere as an enveloping feeling, Gatt argues that our bodies are immersed in atmospheres in which we dwell, and that by participating in their creation, atmospheres can have a constitutive character. This idea of atmosphere as an existential precondition characterises it as a medium that allows for a “daily awareness of the space we are imbued with” (Gatt 2018, p. 149). While highlighting how a singer adjusts their performance depending on the different materials they sing with, such as space made of stones, concrete, or wood, Gatt notes that “initiating particular vibrations in a particular place depends on a careful giving and receiving, in the very process of making the sound which requires a constant adjustment” (Gatt 2018, p. 142). By adapting the performance to the auditory spectrum of the space (Gatt 2018), the space becomes a participant in the performance (Berleant 1999). As the performance takes place, the performer has in mind the awareness and knowledge of the space in which he is singing, as well as his audience and the social circumstances of the performance. Therefore, these adaptations are made not only for auditory and aesthetic

reasons, but also to make the performance “touch listeners in a particular way” (Gatt 2018, p. 142). Based on Ingold’s idea that there is no such thing as a complete object and different aspects of every place are constantly emerging, she suggests that the atmosphere “emerges within a field of mutually constitutive relationships” (Gatt 2018, p. 148). Drawing on the example of the audience as participants in performance, the author points out how the atmosphere that arises from the participants not only affects the participants themselves but is also simultaneously influenced by them. Consequently, she concludes that “to know an atmosphere implies being able to participate in making it” (Gatt 2018, p. 136), while experiencing the atmosphere implies the ability to “perceive the permeating transformations that are constantly happening in order for the world to come into being” (Gatt 2018, p. 147).

### 5. Discussion: Music as a Tool for Exploring Social Contexts: Creating Cultural Meaning within the Context of Pilgrimage

As inherently performative rituals, pilgrimages presuppose the use of symbols as a means of executing transformation. As the phrases used to denote the church imply a glorious fishing past and its significance for the community, the historical and contextual background of this pilgrimage site, along with its specific origins, suggest the establishment of local identity and community cohesion, using the former fishery as a focal point. In that sense, one might assume that the performance of this pilgrimage is grounded exclusively in the symbols of fishing and fishery. However, the pilgrimage is influenced by sailing through an archipelago that, until recently, constituted the economic, social, and cultural entity of Sali. Given that the administrative border aligns with the demarcation line of the Sali municipality, pilgrims enter foreign territory shortly after departing from the port. When observing sailing through the archipelago as part of the act of the pilgrimage itself, it becomes evident how certain motives, values, and ideas, along with behaviours, are interwoven into the practice. Considered a dynamic system capable of undergoing changes within the context of temporal sociocultural processes, Turner and Turner define symbols as a semantic arena of numerous signs originating from various temporal, political, cultural periods, and influences (Turner and Turner 1978). As the symbols of fishing and fishery intertwine with the individual experience of sailing through the archipelago, the pilgrimage can be understood as a process of transition from a usual place to a destination or state that embodies important ideals for the pilgrim (Morinis 1992). In that sense, one could assume that in this particular “sacred journey” (Morinis 1992), the pilgrims’ destination is the sole tangible remnant of the fishery, namely the Little Mary Church in Piškera.

This assumption was put into question by a compelling and immersive atmosphere created by the sung liturgy and the continuous vocal performance of local folk songs and contemporary popular songs celebrating life connected to the sea, merged with the harsh island surroundings we found ourselves in. Drawing on my musical education and singing experience, I could not only discern the technical accuracy and aesthetic dimension of the singing but also actively participate in the performance, thus fully immersing myself in the festive atmosphere of the pilgrimage. Being involved in its creation allowed me to comprehend the importance pilgrims attributed to singing, the sincerity in their approach to performance, and the subsequent impact on their emotions. This festive and overwhelming atmosphere created a noticeable shift from my prior knowledge about the location to the experiential insights gained during the fieldwork. I assumed that singing is a means of creating atmosphere; an existential precondition in perceiving the space around us (Gatt 2018), and thus an important part of this pilgrimage. Therefore, my goal was to observe the pilgrimage through its processuality, which I conducted through a case study of the singers.

Assembled of various individuals driven by the same motivation, the group of singers forms a temporary social group whose performances are “vital events in social interaction and community building” (Greene 2003). Their internalised knowledge of each individual’s capabilities, vocal range, and performance style enables their performance to unfold without explicitly stating an intention. This “perfect cooperation of all performers” (Blacking 1969) indicates the continuity of this group. Further, my participation in the performance



at a time when I was simply a stranger to most of them made the boundaries of this community permeable. This designates singing to be a means of status homogenisation. Although they are not all members of the church choir, the singers are bearers of the sung liturgy during the Piškera pilgrimage. Rooted in Medieval liturgies performed by the laity in the vernacular language, *Saljska pučka misa* is this community's direct connection with the past. In that sense, when performed, it is the confirmation of the community's continuity, as well as confirmation of their religious identity. Performed today only on major holidays and some important days in its Catholic calendar, it is transformed into a signifier of exceptional rituals, serving as a means of festivity. In that sense, by performing it at Piškera, the community designates this pilgrimage as a significant day in its religious calendar and emphasises the importance that the pilgrimage holds for them.

Adapting their singing to the auditory spectrum of the space (Gatt 2018), the pilgrims make the performance louder and fill the space with sound, thus amplifying the performers' and participants' physical and emotional sensations. By merging the performance of the liturgy with this specific practice, the singers activate the space and influence the senses of the participants. In that sense, the church is not to be considered only a symbolic participant in the performance but also a physical and auditory one (Berleant 1999). Additionally, by participating in singing the liturgy, participants can have a shared experience (Wood 2018) of performing their past as well as communicating with the divine or attaining a transcendental state that results in community cohesion, and thus create a common temporality in which they achieve *communitas*. This homogenisation of status reflects on the meaning of religious and cultural fundamental values and ritualised acts of correspondence between the religious paradigm and the shared human experience (Turner and Turner 1978). Furthermore, by referring to specific social situations and what liturgy communicates, the performance raises awareness of emotions already associated with the referenced social situations, as well as strengthening the values of the community that the performance represents (Blacking 1969). In that sense, by referencing their relationship with the location, the pilgrims embody the community's presence in the location they are now restricted from. Simultaneously, they designate this pilgrimage a significant day in the community's religious calendar. In the context of this research, the relevance of the liturgy goes beyond its historical connection; it includes its performance in the present. Considering the specific legal property relations in Piškera, singing this specific liturgy, which is an evident connection with their past, in a monument of an important part of the community's history, holds political significance. In that sense, by performing liturgy that is directly connected with their past in the current cultural, social, and political context, pilgrims reflect on contemporary local contexts within this community (Bohlman 1996) and thus inscribe new meanings to their locality.

Considering that the border separating the archipelago follows the demarcation line of the Sali municipality, the pilgrims find themselves entering the jurisdiction of Murter municipality shortly after departing Sali harbour. As mentioned before, during the three-day pilgrimage, this group of singers navigates the archipelago's waters, making deliberate stops at specific locations and singing. During the mapping of their itinerary, the interlocutors pointed out the locations of vineyards, fishing routes, and locations. Some of them were utilised by them, and some were reminiscences of their parents and ancestors. Very soon, it became clear that for this group, the pilgrimage begins as soon as they board the ship and commence their journey, throughout which their sailing route strongly correlates with the route the Sali community used for generations. Merged with their reminiscences of using the archipelago's sailing routes, fishing places, and all the internalised knowledge needed to navigate its waters, the sail transforms the archipelago into a cultural landscape. As the dynamic interplay between the emotional and cognitive aspects of the pilgrims' experience is heightened by encountering cultural landscape (Turner and Turner 1978), by sailing through the archipelago, the singers designate their pilgrimage ritual topography.

Besides the fact that the very act of sailing evokes the spatial context and the territorial, social, and political implications arising from it, stopping at specific locations to sing creates

a “sense of connection (. . .) to those who have encountered the object and song through the past” (Barush 2021, p. 52). As it belongs to the realm of the experiential, music poses the characteristics to awaken or intensify emotions that are already embedded in a social situation or space. Therefore, while singing at certain locations, this community is arousing and intensifying emotions stemming from their relationship with the archipelago. By doing so, it activates the senses, which, combined with the context of the locality, creates “a fully embodied experience” (Barush 2021, p. 53). If taking in account the Mahajan (2021) method that proclaims imaginative relationality as its centre, it can be said that the singers are performing their space. As property discussions, recollections of the community’s ancestral holdings, and the bygone era of unrestricted access to the archipelago’s waters emerged, it became clear that the community’s reminiscences of historic mobilities intertwine with their attitudes, which are shaped by recent political, social, and economic processes. By encountering and navigating significant sites and sharing their memories of using the archipelago space, the pilgrims are invoking their former territory. As sound does not adhere to the physical boundaries of space, but rather envelops it, singing during the pilgrimage shapes pilgrims’ mental landscape, within which the physical boundaries inscribed in the archipelago’s physical space collapse (Bohlman 1996). In that sense, the pilgrims manifest their presence auditorily. Furthermore, singing serves as a means of communication through which the pilgrims symbolically express their relationship with the archipelago and reflect on the power relations within it.

Observed from the perspective of those who perform it, singing thus becomes a “powerful mediator, forcing pilgrims to share an acoustic space and create bridges—intentionally or otherwise—between the sacred and secular realms of human activity” (Wood 2018, p. 232). By mapping the space through navigation and song, the community embodies its presence within the archipelago, performatively reaffirming its past dominance. Navigation through the archipelago during this pilgrimage evokes this community’s cultural memory, which is further encouraged and empowered by singing that communicates social messages about their centuries of use of the archipelago and the recent changes to its internal power dynamics. In that sense, despite contributing to the establishment of a fishing identity, the significance of this pilgrimage seems to extend far beyond that narrow scope. When observed through the concept of “ritual performance” (Brown 2003), the pilgrimage to Piškera deviates from the predetermined discourse that refers to the former fishing village of Sali and the community’s glorious fishing history. The singers’ performances construct this pilgrimage ritual topography by sailing through the archipelago and singing, defining it primarily by navigable routes, fishing spots, and significant locations in their reminiscences. Thus, they construct the archipelago as a temporal place that embodies the pilgrims’ value-based ideal (Morinis 1992). In this sense, it becomes apparent that this pilgrimage’s cultural landscape involves much more than one location defined as its “centre” (Turner and Turner 1978). Therefore, it is necessary to expand the concept of the centre beyond Piškera to the archipelago itself as the community perceives it.

## 6. Conclusions

Music is an integral part of religion that can convey what is beyond language and enhance sensory and emotional aspects; however, when observed as a “social process” (Merriam 1964) and through the lens of “ritual performance”, it can also be considered an instrument of constructing new cultural meanings (Brown 2003). Observing singing through its symbolic background, I presume that it is more than a means of creating embodied experiences or representing values and beliefs. By observing it as the performative aspect of this pilgrimage, I consider it a tool for understanding this practice through the experiences of those who participate in it. This case study thus shows that a new layer of the pilgrimage can be seen when it is observed through singing.

Emerging from the relationship between the community of Sali and the Kornati archipelago, which includes shifts in territorial and power dynamics due to economic, political, social, and political influences, the pilgrimage to Piškera takes place within a

highly complex context. By singing Saljska pučka misa during the pilgrimage ceremony, the community reaffirms its continuity in a place once inhabited by their fishermen. Simultaneously, the group of singers sail through the archipelago for three days and mark the space by singing. Hence, apart from being the primary factor in creating a festive atmosphere, singing during the Piškera pilgrimage is an act of embodying this community's presence within the archipelago. Therefore, within this pilgrimage, singing is a means of creating and embodying meaning (Bohlman 1996; Barush 2021).

Singing while sailing through a space where specific experiences, history, and knowledge are already inscribed intensifies emotions, but it also reflects shifts in power dynamics, becoming a multivocal and polysemic practice. In addition to being a means of creating an atmosphere of solemnity and embodying the continuity and presence of the community during the ritual, singing transforms sailing through the archipelago into a cultural performance, within which it creates cultural meanings related to the space. Although the church in Piškera is the sanctuary of this pilgrimage, when observed through processuality, in this specific case of singing, its centre is neither the church nor Piškera Bay. Instead, the space of the archipelago through which the community navigates, and sings, becomes its sacred periphery (Turner and Turner 1978). Drawing on Turner and Turner's definition of *communitas* as the pilgrim's individual experience, Morinis defines pilgrimage as a journey on which a person seeks a place or state believed to embody their cultural values. During the pilgrimage to Piškera, this ideal is embodied within singing, which constructs the archipelago as a part of the Sali community, making it the community's "sacred place" (Morinis 1992). The singing of this group transforms the secular space of the archipelago into a sacred periphery, whereby sacredness as "the quest for an ideal" (Morinis 1992) becomes a central place for the individual (Turner and Turner 1978), which defines singing as this pilgrimage's constitutive element.

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