EUROPE'S RISING REGIONALISM AND THE QUEST FOR AUTONOMY:

THE CASE OF 'ISTRIAN IDENTITY'

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes the concepts of regional identity and regionalism, discussing at the same time the way pro-regional politicians are using European integration in their pro-autonomy rhetoric. The focus of the thesis is the emergence of regional identitarian politic and the construction of regional identity in the richest and most multi-ethnic Croatian region, Istria. The main question this thesis addresses is whether local people in Istria developed regional identity feelings in the way political elites are trying to promote, to what extent is that identity meaningful in everyday life, and how it correlates with their support for the autonomy of Istria. The study also examines the inclusiveness/exclusiveness of regional self-identification, the differences between generations and the possible motives of actors promoting regional identity Istria's right to autonomy. In order to answer these questions, individual semi-structured interviews with people living in the region were carried out and critical discourse analysis of the interviews and speeches by the main regional leader, Ivan Jakovcic, was done. Findings indicate three key things. First, the main motive for the regional leaders' promotion of regional identity is of economic nature and with the aim to gain support for their regionalist plans. Second, regional identity does take an important place for majority of the interviewed subjects, but is not meaningful in their everyday life and is not that much in line with what the regional elites' are trying to promote. Third, the regional self-identification is not exclusive of other types of identifications and its strength correlates lowly with people's support for the autonomy of Istria. Contrary to expectations, the differences between generations were not significant.

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1. Introduction

> *„What we are dealing with here is the unity of diversities, survival and the building of the unique ethno-foundation. The history of Istria used to be the school of life and it still is. An example of social splitting, intolerance... but also acculturation, coexistence... namely, an example of the European history in miniature. An entire galaxy of social worlds – big and small ones – both sensitive and resistant."*[1]

The beginning of 2011 saw the Youth of the Istrian Democratic Assembly[2] (IDS) calling for the people in Istria, the most western borderland of the Republic of Croatia, and all those who feel like Istrians to identify themselves as such in the upcoming census that took place the same year in April. Declaring such regional attachments in the census has been constantly rejected by politicians of other regional parties, since Croatia's independence. The result was a heated debate between politicians and intellectuals labeling regional self-identification as potentially separatist and dangerous, and those claiming that such identifications do not exclude being Croat at the same time and that the specificities of Istrian identity are its inclusiveness of different affiliations and blending of cultures of different ethnic groups. However, constant referring to the need for bigger regional autonomy by Istrian politicians triggers doubts over the true intentions of those engaged in identitarian politics. Today, when we witness the growth of sub-state regionalism across Europe, the issue of the correlation between the existence of regional identification and regionalism in the richest and most multi-ethnic Croatian region, Istria, will be addressed in this thesis.

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[1] Darko Dukovski, *Istra: Kratka Povijest Dugog Trajanja - Od Prvih Naseobina Do Danas (Istria: A Short History That Lasts for Long - From the First Settlements Until Today)* (Pula: Istarski ogranak Društva Hrvatskih književnika, 2004), 231.

[2] The Istrian Democratic Assembly (IDS-DDI, the abbreviation stands for „*Istarski Demokratski Sabor – Dieta Democratica Istriana*") is the strongest (regional) political party in Istria, and also the only regional party that has managed to enter the Parliament in the short history of Croatia.

1.1. The Regional Identitarian Politics and Everyday Experience in Istria

The notion of Istrian identity is certainly not a new one, and it has already sparked interest of researchers. Specific historic developments, demographic changes and cultural and ethnic diversity make Istria a fertile ground for developing regional self-identification, and also an intriguing place to study. Many politicians and intellectuals polemicized regional and national identities already in the 1990s, despite the fact that during the era of Franjo Tudjman, the first president of Croatia, it was unimaginable to promote regional identity in an extremely centralized country where the only imaginable allegiance was the one towards the Croatian nation. Boris Banovac, famous Croatian sociologist, argued that regional identity in Istria is well-developed and strong, and is being expressed in every aspect of one's life.[3] Furthermore, he stated that regional self-identification is connected more to the notion of the region than to ethnicity; therefore the national and regional identities in Istria are compatible and are not competing against each other. Petar Janko and Fulvio Suran also made a case for a strong, developed and inclusive regional identity which can, in some cases, even compete with the national one.[4]

The most recent work has been done by John Ashbrook, who has mostly focused on the regional party, IDS and the way the regional leaders have been politicizing regional identity.[5] Ashbrook focused on investigating the relationship between the then ruling Croatian

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[3] Boris Banovac, *Društvena Pripadnost, Identitet, Teritorij. Sociološko Istraživanje Regionalne Pripadnosti u Istri (Social Belonging, Identity, Territory. Sociological Study of the Regional Belonging in Istria)* (Rijeka: Pravni fakultet, 1998); Boris Banovac, "Etnicki Identitet i Regionalna Pripadnost - Primjer Istre (Ethnic Identity and Regional Affiliation - the Case of Istria)" (PhD, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Zagreb, 1996).

[4] Petar Janko, *O Istri i Istrijanstvu Je Rijec (It Is About Istria and Istrianity)* (Pula: C.A.S.H., 1997), http://www.superknjizara.hr/index.php?page=knjiga&id_knjiga=6997.; Fulvio Suran, "Istrijanstvo Kao Slabiji (odnosno Jaci) Identitet (Istrianity as the Weaker (or Stronger) Identity)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 2, no. 4–5 (6–7) (July 1993): 769–782.

[5] John Ashbrook, "Locking Horns in the Istrian Political Arena: Politicized Identity, the Istrian Democratic Assembly, and the Croatian Democratic Alliance," *East European Politics and Societies* 20, no. 4 (2006): 622–658; John Ashbrook, *Buying and Selling the Istrian Goat (Istrian Regionalism, Croatian Nationalism, and EU Enlargement)*, vol. 13, Regionalism & Federalism (Bruxelles, Bern, Berlin, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang: Internatianal Academic Publishers, 2008); John Ashbrook, "Politicization of Identity

nationalist party, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), and its primary regionalist opponent, IDS, throughout the 1990s, concluding that regionalism can be as hegemonic as nationalism, and that Istrian identity was successfully politicized by numerous actors from both Croatian and Italian political arena who, for various reasons, tried to use this identity in order to achieve their own goals.[6] Part of his work also focused on the examination of the historiography of Istria, where he showed in-depth how Istria has been a place of political and social struggles to ascribe belonging of this contested borderland region to both Croatia and Italy.[7]

As a continuously contested borderland, Istria has been an unstable region throughout its history, and many intellectuals and historians have been trying to demonstrate the "natural" connection of the region with Croatian or Italian nation, and at the same shaping Istrian identity as an outcome of historic ties with the specific nation or national ethnicity. All of this had an important impact on the local people, and has shaped their resentment and aversion to centralizing and homogenizing powers. The perceptions of the local population have also been researched by Ashbrook. That Istrians express their regional identification and that it is quite strongly felt among the population, as Banovac already argued, has been confirmed by Ashbrook as well. Nevertheless, his research had a slightly different focus. Despite addressing the following questions: "What is Istrian identity?", "What characteristics are part and parcel of such an identity?" and "When is Istrian identity employed?"[8], his main aim was to describe why Istrians consider themselves different and superior to their co-nationals and nationals of

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in a European Borderland: Istria, Croatia, and Authenticity, 1990–2003," *Nationalities Papers* 39, no. 6 (November 2011): 871–897.

[6] Ashbrook, *Buying and Selling the Istrian Goat (Istrian Regionalism, Croatian Nationalism, and EU Enlargement)*.

[7] John Ashbrook, "'Istria Is Ours, and We Can Prove It': An Examination of Istrian Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," *The Carl Beck Papers in Russian and Eastern European Studies* no. 1707 (May 2006): 1–40, doi:10.5195/cbp.2006.128.

[8] John Ashbrook, "Self-perceptions, Denials, and Expressions: Istrianity in a Nationalizing Croatia, 1990–1997," *Nationalities Papers: The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 33, no. 4 (August 2006): 459–460.

the bordering countries (primarily Serbs and Herzegovinians).[9] He argues that the language of "nesting balkanisms"[10] has been accepted and widely used by the population of Istria due to several reasons, the most important of them being

- HDZ's ethnonationalist and centralizing politics supported by large majority of Croatians from other regions, and

- stereotyping the neighboring countries' nationals as having 'balkan traits' as propagated by the West, and lacking Western, liberal and multicultural values (due to temporal and spatial closeness, as well as lack of direct damage and atrocities of the Croatian war of Independence, Serbs were not thought of in so negative terms as were Herzegovinians and co-nationals).[11]

Researchers like Boris Banovac, Fulvio Suran, John Ashbrook and many others already argued that Istrian identity exist and can successfully compete with the national one. However, there is no significant research made on the construction of regional identity among the Croats living in Istria after the year 2000, which marked the end of the rule of the far-right party which promoted the centralization of the country, and no explanation for the re-emergence of regional self-identification in the 2011 census, especially when looking at English-language scholarship. Furthermore, the questions of the meaning of regional identity in everyday life and regional autonomy have also been poorly analyzed. Considering that Istrian 'identity talk' and 'identity politics' have become most prominent during the past couple of years with the president of IDS, Ivan Jakovcic, stating that Istria will open the question on regional autonomy after the accession of Croatia to the EU, and that the decision will be made by the people of Istria on a referendum, there is a need to research how people

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[9] Ashbrook, "Self-perceptions, Denials, and Expressions: Istrianity in a Nationalizing Croatia, 1990–1997."

[10] The term is used by Ashbrook to describe the perception of other as people from the Balkans (*balkanci*) with all the negative associations this term is loaded. The term is coined using Bakic-Hayden article on „nesting orientalisms. *See* Milica Bakic-Hayden, "Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of the Former Yugoslavia," *Slavic Review* 54, no. 4 (Winter 1995): 917–931.

[11] Ashbrook, "Self-perceptions, Denials, and Expressions: Istrianity in a Nationalizing Croatia, 1990–1997."

living in Istria resonate with the promoted Istrian identity and claims about regional autonomy within the EU. The present thesis aims to build up on the existing research on Istrian identity and at the same time fills the existing gap in the literature related to regional autonomy in Istria and the local peoples' perception of the EU. What distinguishes this thesis from the research done so far is its use of the concept of everyday ethnicity in order to look at the way people respond to regional elites' identitarian politics and express their identity in everyday life. The thesis does not focus solely on the characteristics that make Istrian identity and when such an identity is employed and can contest the national one. Instead, the thesis researches the complex relationship between the ways the local people self-identify; how regional identity has been constructed and is shaped by the choices people make; and the level of importance of such an identity in everyday life.

The purpose of this thesis is to study the emergence of regional identitarian politics, and the impact of such rhetoric on the perceptions and identification of the locals, in the light of Croatia's expected accession to the European Union. By examining the specific socio-historical features that make this region unique in Croatia, I analyze the construction of Istrian regional identity, while at the same time identifying the key actors who advocate stronger regional identity. My main focus is on the congruence of people's self identification with the regional identification strongly promoted by the leading regional party, IDS, as well as their level of support for the autonomy of Istria. The thesis also deals with differences and similarities between self-identification of local people from different generations. The aim of this thesis is not to make any generalizations, and therefore I limit my research to examining different narratives on regional self-identification by the locals. Moreover, due to time constraints, I focus solely on Croats living in Istria, leaving the issue of regional identity among other ethnicities living in the region for further research.

The thesis consists of a theoretical and an empirical part. The theoretical part is divided in two chapters. The first chapter consists of a theoretical background that offers analysis of the key concepts, namely identity, regional identity and regions. A small part is dedicated to discussing the overpriced role of the EU in promoting regionalism and the way the pro-regional politicians are using European integration in their pro-autonomy rhetoric. In the second chapter, Istria's regional specificities that make it quite a unique region in Croatia are analyzed, and the way it reflects in self-identification of the locals and the construction of the Istrian identity is examined. This is followed by an empirical study of the identity building in Istria. The methodology used is discussed in the following part.

1.2. Methodology

The thesis adopts an inter-disciplinary approach of history, sociology and political science to answer the relevant questions. The main question is: Have local people in Istria developed regional identity feelings in the way political elites are trying to promote it and to what extent is that identity meaningful in everyday life. In addition to this, there are several other important questions this thesis will address. Is this regional identification, where it exists, inclusive or exclusive regarding other existing identifications and is there a difference in the strength of identification between different generations? Moreover, how does this identity correlate with the support for the autonomy of Istria and with the support for decentralization of Croatia? Furthermore, what are the possible motives of actors promoting regional identity and claiming the right of Istria to autonomy?

In order to answer these questions, I carried out individual semi-structured qualitative interviews with people living in the region and critical discourse analysis of the interviews and speeches by the main leader of IDS, Ivan Jakovcic. Therefore, the thesis does not solely

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focus on the rhetoric by regional political leaders, but also on the social realities provoked by such rhetoric. The reason why I focused on both the 'top-down' and the 'bottom-up' approaches is the fact that the construction of regional identity in Istria depends both on the role of political leaders and elites, and also the way people themselves internalize and project such an identity. In examining the process of the construction of regional identity, the thesis focuses on the narratives of locals living in nine Istrian towns, namely Bale, Buzet, Labin, Pazin, Porec, Pula, Rovinj, Vodnjan and Tinjan, and studying their everyday experiences. The analytical framework of 'everyday ethnicity'[12] will be of great use here.

By using such an approach, I avoid any reification of groups and their political agendas, and also groupism that sees each group as clearly distinct and delineated from each other. Instead of conceptualizing groups in an essentialist and substantialist way as things and entities in the world, it is necessary to look at them in terms of practical categories, cognitive schemas, situated actions, organizational routines and discursive frames.[13] The term Istrian is not used in a way to ascribe a set of characteristics to Istrians (except when talking about how regionalist leaders are constructing the identity of an Istrian), but in a way that reflects the regional self-identification of the locals. Therefore, the thesis does not examine group as an entity, but rather groupness as a "contextually fluctuating conceptual variable."[14] By focusing on processes and relations, a fuller picture of a construction of one's identifications can be provided, showing how ethnicity and nationhood are constructed.

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[12] The term is borrowe from Rogers Brubaker who uses this approach in the study of ethnicity and nationhood. See Rogers Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). For more literature on the ways in nationhood is negotiated and reproduced in everyday life look in: Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1995); Michael Skey, "The National in Everyday Life: A Critical Engagement with Michael Billig's Thesis of Banal Nationalism," *The Sociological Review* 57, no. 2 (2009): 331–346; Tim Edensor, *National Identity, Popular Culture and Everyday Life* (Oxford ; New York: Berg Publishers, 2002). Moreover, the Rutledge series 'New Sociology' consists of 12 books, all of them dealing with 'everyday life'.

[13] Rogers Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2004), 11.

[14] Ibid.

For the interviews I plan to conduct with the locals, I will partly implement the method used by Brubaker when researching nationalist politics and everyday ethnicity in Cluj, Transylvania, meaning researching 'elements' of everyday concerns, like getting by, getting ahead, neighbors, school, and work.[15] Nevertheless, I will include more elements in my interviews, due to the nature of questions this thesis wants to answer. In this sense, I will rely on Jon E. Fox and Miller-Idriss' research agenda for examining "the actual practices through which ordinary people engage and enact (and ignore and deflect) nationhood and nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives."[16] This research agenda will be applied to self-identification instead of nationhood, and it considers four ways in which identity as a discursive construct is produced and reproduced in everyday life[17]:

1. 'talking the identity' – discursive construction of identity, not simply as a response to elite dictates, but resonating with contingencies of everyday life,

2. 'choosing the identity' – the way identity shapes, and is shaped, by choices people make,

3. 'performing the identity' – the way people engage and interpret – and ignore and deflect – popular meaning and resonance of symbols (e.g. flags and anthems), and

4. 'consuming the identity' – the ways in which "identity politics" is received and consumed by the people at whom it is aimed.

The reason why I opted for the qualitative research interview is the fact that such an interview "attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold the meaning of peoples' experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific

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[15] Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town*, 167–172, 191–206, 380–386.

[16] Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (December 2008): 539.

[17] Fox and Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood." Fox and Miller use terms „nationhood" and „nation"; however, I instead use terms „self-identification" and „identity."

explanations."[18] In my fieldwork, I conducted semistructured interviews, which I find to be a useful tool in the research of the perception and construction of identities, because they offer a deeper understanding of personal perspectives on identity and politics, and their everyday experiences as well. Opting for semistructured interviews instead of other types of interviews (e.g. the informal conversational interview or the standardized open-ended interview)[19] allowed me to alter the suggested questions according to the answers given and the stories told by the interviewees.[20]

Another method used in the present thesis, in addition to interviews with locals, is discourse analysis, in order to examine Jakovcic's identity building project, and the nature of his idea of Istrianness – is he promoting it as a cultural identity or a territorial one, as a separate identity or a nested one. For identifying the motives behind such a prominent call on developing Istrian identity as well as possible factors that lie behind their quest for autonomy and broader support for it, chosen interviews, statements and speeches by Jakovcic, in the period since 2000 and the end of the right-wing, centralizing government rule by HDZ, are analyzed. According to Ruth Wodak, discourse analysis "provides a general framework to *problem-oriented social research*,"[21] and critical discourse analysis (CDA) can also explain how discourse influences social identity, social relations, as well as knowledge systems and value systems. There are numerous types of discourse analysis, and this study draws largely on the methodological framework of critical discourse analysis, by combining Ruth Wodak's and Theo van Leeuwen's approach to CDA.

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[18] Steinar Kvale, *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 1996), 1.

[19] For more on the various types of interviews, see: Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed (Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage Publications, 2002), 341–347, 349.

[20] Kvale, *Interviews*, 124. In preparation for interviewing, I also used the following books: Daphne M. Keats, *Interviewing: a Practical Guide for Students and Professionals* (Buckingham [England] ; Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2001); Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: a Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed (New York: Teachers College Press, 1998); Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*.

[21] *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire [England] ; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2.

By employing both interviewing and discourse analysis in the empirical research, this thesis combines the 'top down' and 'bottom up' approaches to the construction of identity, giving a more round picture of the way regional identity is constructed and narrated in Istria. The last chapter summarizes the main findings of my research, and gives suggestions for possible further research. The argument put forward in this thesis is that the rhetoric of IDS that promotes strong regional identity and autonomy for Istria (economic and power motives) is inconsistent with the way local population, especially the younger ones, self-identifies themselves, and with their preferences for decentralization of Croatia.

2. Theoretical Background

The thesis is a study of the emerging notion of what is claimed to be Istrian regional identity, both as constructed by the key political actors, as well as expressed and narrated in the everyday life of local people. The literature on identity building has often focused solely on the top-down approach, overemphasizing the influence of regional elites. Nevertheless, such an approach does not give the complete picture on the formation of identity, and has to be accompanied by the bottom-up one.[22] Therefore, this thesis will not only identify the key actors who advocate stronger regional identity and autonomy, and analyze their discourse, but it will also look at the way people respond to that discourse and express their identity in everyday life.

In order to do so, I will first discuss the contested concepts of identity, region and regionalism, giving a theoretical framework for the analysis of the emergence of regional identitarian discourse/politics, and the effects of such rhetoric on the identification of the locals. This will be followed by a close examination of the idea of the "Europe of the Regions", as I will place the discourse on regional identity and autonomy in the wider context of the rise of regionalism across Europe.

2.1. Definition of Key Terms: How to Analyze Regional Identity?

Before starting to discuss regional identity, it is necessary to look at the concept of identity. Identity is one of those vague terms that are regularly used, but without an agreement about what it actually entails. Understanding of the meaning of identity has varied significantly over time. In what follows, I will discuss the major schools of thought on

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[22] Ruth Wodak and Lynne Pearce, "(Re)constructing the Region in the 21st Century," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (2010): 7.

identity, starting with primordialism and constructivism, and including Rogers Brubaker's provocative criticism of the term.

2.1.1. The Concept of 'Identity'

According to the primordialist and perennialist understandings, identity is something intrinsic and inherent that existed throughout the human history; it is a given. They assume there are certain primordial attachments that exist in all societies, based on blood, culture, race, language, religion, region, etc. The emphasis is put on the biological co-descendants from the group, disregarding the importance of interaction between people from the group.[23] The main issues here are the inability of these theories to account for the changes in people's self-identification and the fact that they do not provide any reasonable argumentation for why we should look at identity as something that is fixed and natural in the first place.

In contrast to primordialism and perennialism, the constructivist understanding of identity views it as a created sentiment, the one which is flexible, manipulative and ever-changing. Constructivists emphasize the process of cultural or social construction of identity. In his influential book "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries", which marked the transition to the new era of studying identity and ethnicity, Frederik Barth writes that the constructivist approach emphasizes collective identity is a social construct and not a cultural given;

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[23] The first to offer primoridalist view on identity was Edward Shils, who stated that the attachment to another member of one's kinship group is felt because there is "a certain ineffable significance attributed to the tie of blood." [Edward Shils, "Primordial, Personal, Sacred, and Civil Ties," *British Journal of Sociology* 8, no. 2 (1957): 142.] One of the big names of primordialism, Cliford Geertz, emphasizes three qualities of identity, namely apriorism, innefability and affectivity, focusing not only on primary kinship groups, but also groups based on perceived common biological descent, race, language, region and religion. [Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (London: Fontana, 1993)., "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States," in *Old Societies and New States: The Quest for Modernity inAsia and Africa* (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 105–157.] After Geertz, Harold Isaacs made further contribution to primordialism, by introducing the concept of a 'basic group identity', which is a result of being born into a certain group at a certain historic time, and it depends on a number of elements, including geography of the place of birth, nationality, culture, and history and the origin of the group one is born into. [Harold Robert Isaacs, *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change*, 1st ed (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).]

henceforth it is constructed by the people themselves.[24] His argument that collective identity is created in a pre-established social system of inter-ethnic relations is to a certain extent limiting, as it primarily focuses on cultural and political elites. Barth's ideas on the importance of elites in construction of ethnic and national identity are taken further by John Breuilly and Paul R. Brass, both of whom also focus on the politics from 'above'.[25]

Studying the elitist rhetoric 'from above' will be useful when identifying the key actors in promoting what is claimed to be Istrian identity and their regionalizing rhetoric. However, since it neglects the idea that identities "depend critically on the claims which people themselves make in different contexts and at different times"[26], there is a need to support it with a micro-analytical perspective. Furthermore, it is questionable to assume that national identification excludes other types of identifications, as Michael Billig did in his seminal book "Banal Nationalism."[27] It also cannot be assumed that particular presentations of the nation are relevant at all times for all people inhabiting a particular political territory.[28] Therefore, a proper explanation for how people assume and inhabit their identities, and how

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[24] Instead of looking at groups of people as discontinuous cultural isolates or with primordialist bonds, he focuses on the on-going negotiations of boundaries between such groups and emphasizes how ethnic identity becomes and is maintained through relational processes of inclusion and exclusion. [Fredrik Barth, ed., *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization Ofculture Difference*, Reprint of the ed. Bergen, 1969 (Oslo: Scandinavian University Press, 1994).]

[25] Breuilly argues that elites, social groups and foreign governments all use nationalism appeals in order to mobilize popular support against the state. According to him, it is not that nationalism emerges from cultural identity, but the other way round. [John Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 2nd ed (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994).] Brass, on the other hand, aims to attack Anthony Smith's ethno-symbolism [Anthony D. Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)., Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity*, Ethnonationalism in Comparative Perspective (London : Reno: Penguin Books ; University of Nevada Press, 1991).], and connects ethnicity and nationalism with the activities of the modern centralizing state. According to him, they are the result of a certain type of interactions between elites from non-dominant ethnic groups (often in the peripheries of the states) and the leadership of centralizing states, they are "creations of elites, who draw upon, distort, and sometimes fabricate materials from the cultures of the groups they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence or to gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves." [Paul R. Brass, *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1991), 8.]

[26] Bechhofer *et al.*, quoted in: Stephen Hester and William Housley, eds., *Language, Interaction and National Identity: Studies in the Social Organisation of National Identity in Talk-in-Interaction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 3.

[27] Billig, *Banal Nationalism*.

[28] Skey, "The National in Everyday Life: A Critical Engagement with Michael Billig's Thesis of Banal Nationalism," 342.

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those identities then shape their actions is necessary since, following Eric Hobsbawm's line of argument, nationhood and ethnicity "cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist."[29]

One cannot but notice how the meanings of identity have proliferated and how no consensus can be reached on what actually identity is. Stuart Hall would say that we need to cease thinking of identity in the way we used to and start to apply the new paradigm, as identity is "an idea which cannot be thought in the old way, but without which certain key questions cannot be thought at all."[30] The question why the use of the term identity is the only way to discuss certain questions remains open. Rogers Brubaker, on the other hand, has harshly criticized the overuse of the term in research in general, arguing that the term has completely lost its analytical weight.[31] He reconstructed the term by suggesting three different clusters of terms to substitute "identity", each of them representing a particular meaning and aspect of identity, namely identification and categorization; self-understanding and social location; and commonality, connectedness, groupness.[32] While all three clusters of terms will be discussed here, I will primarily focus on the first two. What is researched in the case of Istria are not only agents who do the identifying, but also the understanding of self and one's location and the way one is prepared to act given the first two.

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[29] E. J Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, 2nd Canto ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 10.
[30] Stuart Hall, "Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'?," in *Questions of Cultural Identity*, ed. Stuart Hall and Paul Du Gay (London: Sage Publications, 1996), 2.
[31] Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*.
[32] Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond Identity," *Theory and Society* 29 (2000): 41–47.

2.1.2. The Construction of Regional Identity

Regional identity has been quite a dynamic branch of research for a very long time, but especially after the 1990s and the emergence of the idea of the "Europe of the regions". Michael Keating described the problem of regional identity – even though it is easy to recognize regional identity as a key element in the construction of regions as social and political spaces and systems of action, defining that identity is much more difficult.[33]

Nowadays, it has become more and more popular to interpret regional identity in constructivist terms. Keating describes it as a social construction formed within a certain context, and influenced by social, economic and political pressures.[34] Geographer David Harvey, who also looks at regional identity in constructivist terms, takes it even further, arguing that localized identities make one of the most dynamic bases for political mobilization, as well as for reactionary exclusionary politics.[35] That is why analyzing region-building is of great importance in understanding the construction of regional identity.

Region-building from above is analyzed by Dimitar Bechev, who argues that motifs of history, geography and culture are a common thing in building a regional identity, and are inextricably linked, contested and politicized, providing fertile ground for politicians who want to construct such an identity.[36] According to the eminent Finnish scholar of geography and regionalism, Anssi Paasi, regional identity has started to be used among politicians and

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[33] Michael Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe: Territorial Restructuring and Political Change* (Cheltenham, UK: E. Elgar, 1998), 85.

[34] He compares regional identities to national ones, in a sense that they rest upon "'imagined communities' rather than lived experience," since people have to relate to others they do not know personally, or have never seen in their life, and precisely because of that they are the product of social mobilization and political leadership. [Ibid., 87.] Dimitar Bechev also looks at regions as based on imagined community of peoples. [Dimitar Bechev, "Contested Borders, Contested Identity: The Case of Regionalism in South-east Europe," *Journal of Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 4, no. 1 (Winter 2004): 77–96.]

[35] This happens especially when regional identities are fused with race, gender, religious and/or class differentiation. [David Harvey, "From Space to Place and Back Again: Reflections on the Condition of Postmodernity," in *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change*, ed. John Bird et al., Futures, New Perspectives for Cultural Analysis (London: Routledge, 1993), 3–29.]

[36] Bechev, "Contested Borders, Contested Identity: The Case of Regionalism in South-east Europe."

policy makers as a slogan for regional governance, marketing and economic development.[37] The narratives of regional identity, writes Paasi, draw on various elements, such as ideas on nature, landscape, environment, culture/ethnicity, dialects, economic issues, relationship between the centre and periphery, marginalization and real/imagined histories. The context of these narratives, therefore, depends on the regimes of power and ideologies 'from above'.[38] Political leaders in Istria have used policy instruments and communication to build a specific glorious image of Istria, calling on its past and connecting it to the European future. Failing to placing the way Istrians identify themselves in such a context would result in great misunderstanding of how people's identity(-ies) in the region are constructed.

Interpretations of regional identities, as forms of classification, are political categories, and as such Paasi deems it useful to make an analytical distinction between two concepts, namely the 'identity of a region' and the 'regional identity' (regional consciousness). The former can be viewed as consisting of "those features of nature, culture and people that are *used* in the discourses and classifications of science, politics, cultural activism, regional marketing, governance and political or religious regionalization to distinguish one region from others."[39] According to Paasi, these classifications are always acts of power performed with the aim of delimiting, naming and symbolizing space and groups of people. On the other hand, regional identity/consciousness points to the "multiscalar identification of people with those institutional practices, discourses and symbolisms that are expressive of the 'structures of expectations' that become institutionalized as parts of the process that we call a 'region'."[40] This is a very important distinction to make, since those two should not be mixed up; 'identity of a region' is more related to the 'top-down' approach, while regional identity is connected

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[37] Anssi Paasi, "The Resurgence of the 'region' and 'regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe," in *Globalising the Regional. Regionalising the Global*, ed. Rick Fawn, vol. 35 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, n.d.), 137–138.

[38] Anssi Paasi, "Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question," *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 4 (2003): 477.

[39] Ibid., 480.

[40] Ibid., 478.

to the 'bottom-up' approach. In the case of Istria, I am interested in both the identity of Istria

as a region, as well as identification of Istrians with institutional practices from above, and in

the empirical part of the thesis I will analyze both.

Regional identity it is often seen as one variant of collective and social identity which

integrates "the objective, material (nature, culture, economics) and subjective

(individual/collective representations) dimensions of a region."[41] The latter provide

framework for social classification among those living in the region, and those outside of the

region. As a special variant of social identity, regional identity should be set in the framework

of the socio-psychological school of thought. British social psychologist Henri Tajfel, the

founder of social identity theory, claims that apart from having a personal identity unique to

every individual, we also possess a social identity that can be understood as an expression of

people's membership in different groups they belong to.[42] Furthermore, those individuals

attach a certain emotional significance to their membership in that particular group, and that

group becomes an important source of their pride and self-esteem. In order to increase it,

writes Tajfel, individuals tend to view their groups more favorably than the other groups,

dividing the world into 'us' and 'them'. Daniel Bar-Tal complements the theory by including

the concept of 'group-beliefs'. According to him, the importance of group-beliefs for the

formation of groups lies in the fact that they serve as foundation for group-formation, as well

as providing necessary bonds for group existence.[43] By uniting members of the group, they

make them different from the out-groups. Bar-Tal argues that "group members are aware that

they share the same unique beliefs that define 'groupness' and thus become aware of the

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[41]   Wolfgang   Knapp,   "Regional   Identity - A   Conceptual   Framework,"   2003,   5,
http://www.saulproject.net/downloads/A%20Sense%20of%20Place/Rhein%20Ruhr%20symposium/W%20Knap
p.pdf.
[42] Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories: Studies in Social Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1981), 254–267.
[43] Daniel Bar-Tal, "Group Beliefs as an Expression of Social Identity," in *Social Identity: International
Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Worchel et al. (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1998), 93–113.

similarity."[44] His argumentation will be important for the analysis of what is claimed to be Istrian identity, since he considers shared group beliefs to be the most significant factor in the group formation. Relying on shared group beliefs is often promoted by regional leaders in multiethnic Istria, since using other types of belonging would be of little use in the construction of identity.

When analyzing regional identity and its relationship to political action, one needs to take into account three elements, namely the cognitive, the affective and the instrumental.[45] The cognitive element refers to people's awareness of the existence of the region, its geographical limits and specificities, and differences/similarities with the other regions. The affective element refers to feelings people have towards the region, and includes the framework a region provides for common identity and solidarity, and how it competes with other forms of solidarity, such as the national one.[46] Finally, the last element is the instrumental one, which refers to region providing a basis for mobilization and collective action in order to pursue certain goals, which may vary from political ones related to attaining regional autonomy, to social or economic ones.

Regional identity can be developed from a sense of belonging and attachment to a certain community.[47] However, the existence of a shared regional identity does not necessarily mean people will go so far as to support regional autonomy. Regional identity can

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[44] Ibid., 94.

[45] Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*, 86–87.

[46] An example of building common identity and solidarity can be found in Central and Eastern Europe, where political elites and inhabitants of regions often stress the European character of their regions and the uniqueness that makes them belong to European community, at the same time distinguishing them and placing them above other regions. [Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk, eds., *Region, State, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, The Cass Series in Regional and Federal Studies (London: Frank Cass, 2002).] This is exactly what is happening in Istria, with regionalist political leaders constantly pointing out the European character of the region, and its 'return home' when Croatia enters the EU. Furthermore, by making such distinctions, they are creating conditions for regional identity to be able to compete with other forms of identifications, like national identity.

[47] Anthony P. Cohen focuses on the symbolic role a community plays in generating people's sense of belonging, describing them as 'communities of meaning'. He claims that people "construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity." [Anthony P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, Key Ideas (London: Routledge, 1995).]

exist without the support for regional autonomy ever developing.[48] Furthermore, people have multiple identities, meaning regional identification is not exclusive of other ones.

Some authors, like Rune Dahl Fitjar, discuss the significance of political and economic factors in identity construction. Despite the significance of factors like the presence of a regional language and a peripheral geographical position, it can be suggested that in those regions with a high level of economic development, as well as highly regionalized party systems, it is more likely that regional identities will be prevalent.[49] Economic growth and prosperity can certainly be noted in Istria as well, and through the analysis of the regionalist leaders' discourse it can easily be noted how often they emphasize the economic prosperity of the region. Therefore, it can be said that in the Istrian case, there is substantial evidence to suggest that the economic growth of the region resulted in the growth of regionalism.

2.1.3. (Re)shaping of Regions: Definitions of the Term and Its Connection to Regionalism

One cannot analyze regional identity without understanding the concept of region. The emergence of the region as a new actor on international scene has resulted in resurgence of interest in research on regions and regionalism.[50] The term region falls into categories of those terms not easily defined, as it has different meanings to different people.

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[48] The second step is politicization of regional identity; meaning that regional identity needs to be used as a "framework for perception and judgment of political issues, notably in voting at elections and referendums." Demands for regional autonomy come as a third step. Nevertheless, in reality, the process does not go that smoothly. [Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*, 88.]

[49] Rune Dahl Fitjar, "Modelling Regional Identities" (presented at the PSA British and Territorial Politics Specialist Group Conference, University of Edinburgh, 2008), 30; Rune Dahl Fitjar, "Explaining Variation in Sub-state Regional Identities in Western Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 49 (2010): 522–544; Rune Dahl Fitjar, *The Rise of Regionalism: Causes of Regional Mobilization in Western Europe* (London and New York: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2010).; Rune Dahl Fitjar, "Building Regions on Economic Success: Prosperity and Regionalism in Rogaland," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 29, no. 4 (2006): 333–355.

[50] Marco Antonsich, "Exploring the Correspondence Between Regional Forms of Governance and Regional Identity: The Case of Western Europe," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 17, no. 3 (July 2010): 261–276.

Several authors emphasize elusiveness of the region and point out to its territorial boundedness and the community of people inhabiting the region and sharing interests corresponding to this fact.[51] On the other hand, Amin Ash refuses to see cities and regions as particular kinds of community that adapt themselves to territorially-defined or spatially constrained political arrangements and choices; instead he sees them as being in possession of a distinctive spatiality as agglomerations of heterogeneity that are locked into a numerous relational networks and they illuminate a certain kind of spatial politics.[52]

From a constructivist point of view, regions are socially and discursively constructed, instead of being taken for granted – they are the product of peoples' imagination, communication and political activity. This view is in line with Paasi's concept of 'institutionalization of regions', which is "a process through which a territorial unit becomes an established entity in the spatial structure and is then identified in political, economic, cultural and administrative institutionalized practices and social consciousness, and is continually reproduced in these social practices."[53] He further emphasizes four simultaneous aspects between which an analytical distinction should be made when discussing the construction of regions, namely the formation of territorial, symbolic and institutional shapes

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[51] Jean Beaufays claims that region is an 'elusive concept' that covers different territorial levels and numerous social contents. [Jean Beaufays, *Théorie Du Régionalisme (Theory of Regionalism)* (Brussels: E. Story-Scientia, 1985).] Miroslav Hroch, Czech historian and political scientist, defines region as "a space, a land which is settled by a collection of people – the region does not have members, but inhabitants, who are not necessarily aware of belonging to this region." [Miroslav Hroch, "Regional Memory: Reflections on the Role of History in (Re)constructing Regional Identity," in Frontiers, Regions and Identities in Europe, ed. Steven G. Ellis and Raingard Eβer, (Thematic Work Group. 5. Frontiers and Identities ; 4) (Pisa: Plus-Pisa university press, 2009), 3.] Marco Antonsich also emphasizes the elusiveness and ambiguity of the geographical character of the region, as well as regional identity, and argues that any geographical space can therefore be expressed as an imagined community and a lived space. [Antonsich, "Exploring the Correspondence Between Regional Forms of Governance and Regional Identity: The Case of Western Europe."]

[52] The importance of distinguishing cities and regions as territorially or relationally interpreted concepts lies in the fact that these two interpretations result in different understandings of what is to be considered as political at the local level. Furthermore, Ash puts forward an interesting argument, positing that what happens in a region is a question of political choice and democracy, and could be found anywhere. Therefore, the politics of regions is in reality no different from politics of the nation or the household. [Amin Ash, "Regions Unbound: Towards a New Politics of Place," *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography* 86, no. 1 (2004): 33–44.]

[53] Anssi Paasi, "Re-constructing Regions and Regional Identity," Nethur lecture (Nijmegen, The Netherlands, November 7, 2000).

of a region, as well as the establishment of a region as an entity within the regional system, together with social consciousness of the society of that region. Keating also suggests that a sense of popular awareness of a region's identity together with an emotional attachment, that is the basis for regional identity, are involved in the formation of a region.[54] According to him, regions are constructions of various elements (e.g. geography, economic cohesion, cultural identity, administrative apparatus, popular identity and territorial mobilization) with greater or lesser cohesion.[55] In cases where those elements coincide in space, one can see the existence of strong regionalism.

Regionalism is a political movement with a specific set of demands. It has taken many forms throughout history; from a movement of territorial defense, through a strategy for economic modernization, to a movement for constitutional change and transformation of the state.[56] The changes in the state and the market that came in the 1990s have also altered the nature of regionalism, which ceased to be in the boundaries of traditional territorial management. This new regionalism focused on placing regions in mutual competition, both in the European and global market.[57] According to Amin Ash, this 'new regionalism' amounts to little without securing the sustained macroeconomic support for the regions.[58]

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[54] Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*, 86.

[55] Ibid., 10–11.

[56] Keating identifies six types of regionalism, namely conservative, 'bourgeois regionalism', progressive, social democratic historic regionalist stream, right-wing populist regionalism, and 'nationalist' movements in some of the historic territories of Europe. In a large majority of cases, those caracteristics are mixed, producing wide variety of regionalisms. (Ibid., 71, 104–109.)

[57] Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*; Michael Keating, John Loughlin, and Kris Deschouwer, *Culture, Institutions, and Economic Development: a Study of Eight European Regions* (Cheltenham, UK ; Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar, 2003), 6–40; Paasi, "The Resurgence of the 'region' and 'regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe"; Allen John Scott, *Regions and the World Economy: The Coming Shape of Global Production, Competition, and Political Order* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); M. Storper, "The Resurgence of Regional Economies, 10 Years Later," *European Urban and Regional Studies* 2, no. 3 (1995): 191–221.

[58] He argues for the need to boost overall growth of the regions at both national and international level, by securing financial and income transfer base, together with expansionary programmes. [Amin Ash, "An Institutionalist Perspective on Regional Economic Development," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 23, no. 2 (1999): 365–378.] The notion of 'new regionalism', as well as Ash's approach was strongly criticized by John Lovering who claims that the new institutionalist paradigm of regional development is deeply problematic. Lovering argues that 'new regionalism' is based on inadequate foundations and tells a story which

Regionalism can also be viewed in political terms, in which case it refers to the politicization of the region. Rokkan and Urwin defined it as "a political movement that seeks to further the regional interests either because it wants to promote the economic development of the region, or because it wants to preserve a cultural identity that has become threatened by cultural standardization."[59]

In this section I focused on various definitions of the terms regional identity, region and regionalism, showing that the constructivist view is the predominant one today. It is precisely in this view that I will also use the terms here, looking at Istria as a social construction within territorial boundaries, and the regional identity as being constructed both through narratives of regional elites, as well as people themselves.

2.2. The Europe of the Regions: The European Union as an Actor in Promoting Regionalism

The architecture of the states in Western Europe has been changing not only due to globalization, but European integration as well. This new emerging context results in regional restructuring and the new role of regions. Marco Antonsich, for example, questionably points to the emergence of the region as a strategic site for economic governance, making it the key centre in processes of capital accumulation and (re)production that occupies a very important

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is largely fictional, failing to explain contemporary regional development in general, which makes it a poor guide to formation of regional policies. Furthermore, he deems that this new regionalism bypasses the political motors of decentralization, failing to address the political construction of markets and economic actors in general. [John Lovering, "Theory Led By Policy: The Inadequacies of the 'new Regionalism' (illustrated from the Case of Wales)," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 23, no. 2 (1999): 379–395.] Lovering is joind in his criticism by Gordon MacLeod who also offers fresh insights for re-theorizing regional change, as well as for re-conceptualizing the emerging forms of regional development and governance. [Gordon MacLeod, "New Regionalism Reconsidered: Globalization and the Remaking of Political Economic Space," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 25, no. 4 (2001): 804–829.]

59 Stein Rokkan and Derek W. Urwin, "Introduction: Centres and Peripheries in Western Europe," in The Politics of Territorial Identity: Studies in European Regionalism, ed. Stein Rokkan and Derek W Urwin (London: Sage, 1982), 4.

position in the regulation of social life.[60] It is important to situate the discussion on regional identity in this context, since regional elites and many scholars manipulate with the level of support the EU is willing to give to regional autonomy, which is also the case in Istria.

Throughout the 1990s, the idea of the 'Europe of the Regions' has been very popular; Loughlin noted that significant changes which were taking place throughout the 1990s in the nature and functions of the nation-state, have paved the way for regions to become more important policy actors in a wider European context.[61] A certain number of scholars still support the thesis on the end of the nation-state and emergence of 'regional states'.[62]

Time has shown that, despite many scholars' enthusiastic discussion of the resurgence of regions and disappearance of the nation-states, the idea of the 'Europe of the regions' has proved to be simply a fancy rhetoric without any actual, substantial meaning; it has become intellectually and politically fashionable to promote it. The initial trends of strengthening regions have vanished and the predicted rise of regions' political power has been very slow to materialize, leaving regions as very weak actors on the European scene.[63] Today, a large number of scholars claim that, instead of nation-states dying-out or regional states appearing, European integration is actually providing a new context where different levels of

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[60] Marco Antonsich, *Exploring the correspondence between regional forms of government and regional identity: The case of Western Europe*, (European Urban and Regional Studies, Vol 17, No. 3, July 2012), p- 261-276.

[61] John Loughlin, „*Europe of the Regions" and the Federalization of Europe*, (Publius: The Journal of Federalism, Vol 26, No. 4, Fall 1996), p. 141-162.

[62] Ken'ichi Omae, *The End of the Nation State: The Rise of Regional Economies* (London: HarperCollins, 1995); Richard Kearney, *Postnationalist Ireland: Politics, Literature, Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[63] Patrick Le Gales and Christian Lequesne, eds., *Regions in Europe*, European Public Policy Series (London: Routledge, 1998); Susana Borrás-Alomar, Thomas Christiansen, and Andrés Rodríguez-Pose, "Towards a `Europe of the Regions'? Visions and Reality from a Critical Perspective," *Regional Politics and Policy* 4, no. 2 (1994): 1–27. However, it would be unfair to claim that European integration has had no impact on the regions. There are important economic and political impacts on the regions, and in many cases, European integration results in positive engagement where regions find a way to profit from it. At the same time, European integration has posed numerous political and constitutional challenges to regions. Not all regions manage to adjust themselves smoothly to the new context and territorial economic disparities can sometimes even be exacerbated. [W. T. M. Molle, A. van Holst, and H. Smit, *Regional Disparity and Economic Development in the European Community* (Farnborough: Saxon House, 1980).]

governments coexist and compete on certain issues.[64] However, even in this environment of multilevel governance, not all regions engage in political and lobbying activities equally. There are indeed great differences between sub-national governments across Europe; in their level of organization, financial resources, political autonomy, and political influence.[65] This is important for the case of Istria as well, because there is no guarantee that regional autonomy in itself would give Istria any real voice in the EU once Croatia enters the EU, a fact that regional leaders are never saying out loudly.

There are several ways of creating a direct link between the regional representatives and the EU.[66] Nevertheless, what regions ultimately lack is the macro-economic powers and coercive instruments that states have at their disposal.[67] In the case of countries from Central

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[64] Frotz Scharpf, "Community and Autonomy: Multi-level Policy-Making in the European Union," *Journal of European Public Policy* 1, no. 2 (1994): 219–242; Gary Marks, "Structural Policy in the European Community," in *Euro-politics: Institutions and Policymaking in the "New" European Community*, ed. Alberta M. Sbragia (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 1992), 191–224; Santiago Petschen, *La Europa de Las Regiones (The Europe of the Regions)* (Barcelona: Generalitat de Catalunya, 1993); J. Barry Jones and Michael Keating, eds., *The European Union and the Regions* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1995); Michael Keating and Liesbet Hooghe, in *European Union: Power and Policy-making*, ed. Jeremy J. Richardson, 3rd ed., European Public Policy Series (London: Routledge, 1996), 261–278; Liesbet Hooghe and Gary Marks, "'Europe with the Regions': Channels of Regional Representation in the European Union," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 26, no. 1 (1996): 73–91.

[65] Hooghe and Marks, "'Europe with the Regions': Channels of Regional Representation in the European Union"; Gary Marks et al., "Competencies, Cracks, and Conflicts Regional Mobilization in the European Union," *Comparative Political Studies* 29, no. 2 (April 1996): 164–192; Charley Jeffery, "Regional Information Offices and the Politics of the 'Third Level' Lobbying" (presented at the UACES Conference, Leicester University, 1995).

[66] One way is through the European Commission, where regional and local governments lobby the EU officials. According to Batt and Wolczuk, the Commission fails to deal with the empowerment of regions, and instead it focuses on administrative capacity, preferring to deal with national governments. [Batt and Wolczuk, *Region, State, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, 209.] The weakened role of the Committee is partly due to the facts that the membership is decided by national governments and that, besides regions, it includes the municipal representatives with different interests. [John Loughlin, "Representing the Regions in Europe: The Committee of the Regions," *Regional and Federal Studies* 6, no. 2 (1996): 147–165.] Regional interests can also be represented through the Assembly of European Regions, which urges for bigger involvement of regions in European decision making. Some other organizations include the following: The International Union of Local Authorities, The Council of Communes and Regions of Europe and Permanent Conference of Local and Regional Authorities. For more information on channels of sub-national representation in the EU look in: Hooghe and Marks, "'Europe with the Regions': Channels of Regional Representation in the European Union."

[67] Nevertheless, Carter and Pasquier argue that the current transformation of governance across the European Union member states, and a new form of European 'regionalization' resulting from it, are offering plenty of opportunities for regions, as well as for the development of new research frameworks. The authors suggest that, if one wants to conduct a proper analysis, regions should be seen as one set of political actors that are situated within a multi-actored arena where centre-periphery relations become more and more important, instead of viewing them as a segmented 'dimension' of the state or the EU, a view widely held in literature on regionalism.

and Eastern Europe, the EU has provided many substantial incentives to regional developments and even though the EU conditionality does not offer any clear and consistent policy prescriptions on regionalization, regions here make constant appeals to 'Europe'.[68] Moreover, the position of the respective states in the EU enlargement process proved to be quite irrelevant, with regions in countries which are not yet members of the EU making the same appeals, Istria being the perfect example. Regional leaders do not miss a single opportunity to appeal to Europe.

Keating argues that what we are seeing in Europe is "an interpenetration of territorial policy spaces, as Europe is increasingly regionalized, regions are europeanized, and the state is both regionalized and europeanized."[69] Nevertheless, the influence of region remains very limited and largely depends on their links to national government, despite the 'Europe of the Regions' rhetoric, which has also started to lose on its popularity. As Anderson and Goodman suggest, "both regionalism and 'Europeanization' are crucially conditioned by the continuing power of states,"[70] which have not disappeared, but simply adapted to the new and changing reality of global power and the shifting demands in the political arena. It can therefore be said that the Istrian regional elites' constant presenting of Istrian autonomy as something that will give Istria more freedom in 'deciding its own destiny' and will be supported by the EU is

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[Caitríona Carter and Romain Pasquier, "European Integration and the Transformation of Regional Governance: Testing the Analytical Purchase of 'Europeanisation," *Queens Papers on Europeanisation* no. 1 (2006).]

[68] Martin Brusis, "European Union Incentives and Regional Interest Representation in Central and Eastern European Countries," *Acta Politica* 45 (2010): 70–89., Batt and Wolczuk, *Region, State, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, 203–213. For more information on the challenges related to European integration that the countries in Central and Eastern Europe are facing, look in: [Michael Keating and James Hughes, eds., *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe: Territorial Restructuring and European Integration*, Regionalism & Federalism no. 1 (Bruxelles: P.I.E.-Peter Lang, 2003).]

[69] Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*, 183.

[70] James Anderson and James Goodman, "Regions, States and the European Union: Modernist Reaction or Postmodern Adaptation?," *Review of International Political Economy* 2, no. 4 (1995): 601.

more of a well-thought rhetoric to gain support from Istrians than it is something to be expected to happen in the reality.[71]

In this chapter, I identified the key concepts and described the relationship between them. After analyzing different theoretical approaches to regional identity and regionalism, I believe that it is useful to use some parts of the constructivist approach to analyze identity politics in Istria. Identities are indeed multiple, and constructed both 'from above' and 'from below'. Nevertheless, it has to be noted that this does not mean that 'Istrian identity' will be seen as a category of practice. Following Brubaker, I will look at regional identity as a category of analysis, in order to avoid reproducing or reinforcing the reification of Istrians as a bounded group of people who all share common identity. Moreover, due to Croatia's soon accession to the EU, as well as regionalist elites' constant calls to Europe, the analysis of the construction of Istrian identity has to be placed in the context of the 'Europe of Region' discussion, taking into account the EU's role in regionalism. In the following section, I will analyze specificities of Istria as a region. Subsequently, I will describe and analyze results of the empirical research on the construction of what is claimed to be Istrian identity.

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[71] Another similar case is the one of Upper Silesia, where Silesial autonomists stress the them of the 'Europe of the Regions' and autonomy withing a reconfigured Polish state. [Michael Keating, "European Integration and the Nationalities Question," *Revista Internacional de Los Estudios Vascos* no. 3 (2008): 11; Wanda Dressler Holohan and Maria Ciechocinska, "The Recomposition of Identity and Political Space in Euorpe: The Case of Upper Silesia," in *Borders, Nations and States*, ed. Liam O'Dowd and Thomas W. Wilson (Aldershot: Averbury, 1996).]

3. Istria – The Past and the Present

> *„All the changes of statehood, political and administrative interventions in the last century have influenced ... the national, demographic, cultural, economic and social composition of Istrian villages as well as the coastal towns they surround. Thus it is not strange that today when Istrians discuss borders what they are really discussing is themselves and their identity, strategies for everyday life and the practices with which they have symbolically and physically interpreted the existence of borders on the multicultural and multiethnic territory of Istria."*[72]

The Istrian peninsula represents an ethnically and nationally heterogeneous, economically rich and culturally diverse border region in Croatia and Europe. Like many other border regions with similar characteristics, Istria has been adapting to perpetually changing political oscillations and constellations of the international environment. Located on the north of the Adriatic Sea, with a Mediterranean climate, fertile ground, intact nature, accessible coast, and political and economic importance, Istria has always been attractive to different peoples and states. Due to this fact, Istria experienced the rule of several different administrations since the 13th century, namely Venetian, Habsburg, French, Austro-Hungarian, Italian, Yugoslavian and Croatian (see Appendix 1 to 3).

Throughout this history, Istria has been a witness to constant ethnic, economic and social change and was for centuries a place of acculturation (*venetization* and *italianization* of names of places, peoples, etc.), diffusion and assimilation. This resulted in numerous, and sometimes even dramatic, changes in population, politics, economy and culture.[73] Such events had unquestionable impact on the structure of the population in Istria, its demographic

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[72] Borut Brumen, "The State Wants It So, and the Folk Cannot Do Anything Against the State Anyway," *Narodna Umjetnost* 33, no. 2 (1996): 150–151.

[73] Miroslav Bertoša, "Talijanski Etnicki Mikrokozmos u Istri: Izmedu 'Crne Rupe' i Antejske Opstojnosti (Italian Microuniverse in Istria: Between the 'Black Hole' and Antaeus Existence)," in *Jezici i Kulture u Doticajima - Zbornik 1. Medunarodnog Skupa* (Pula: Pedagoški fakultet u Rijeci, Znanstveno-nastavna djelatnost, 1989); Dukovski, *Istra: Kratka Povijest Dugog Trajanja - Od Prvih Naseobina Do Danas (Istria: A Short History That Lasts for Long - From the First Settlements Until Today)*; Robert Matijašic, "Starija Povijest Istre i Neki Njezini Odrazi Na Novije Razdoblje (The Early History of Istria and Some Reflections on Modern Times)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 2, no. 4–5 (6–7) (July 1993): 569–585.

specificities, as well as religious and language diversity, all of which are important when talking about identitarian politics in Istria and self-identification of the local population. Therefore, in this chapter I do three things. First, I analyze Istra's regional specificities through the region's historical turbulences and changes, and also its demographic diversity. Second, I identify influential actors in promoting and constructing regional identity. Third, I describe how the quest for regional autonomy is connected to Croatia's accession to the EU and what could the possible implications of such a quest on the whole country be.

3.1. A Brief History of Istria

The history of Istria is quite a turbulent one, full of ethnic, economic, political and social changes.[74] It can, therefore, be said that the Istrian peninsula is, from a geographical and anthropological point of view, a 'transitional territory' (*prijelazni teritorij*), while from a historical and cultural point of view it represents an 'intersection of the meeting of peoples and different civilizations' (*sjecište susreta naroda i razlicitih civilizacija*).[75] The peninsula has been influences by many different cultures, primarily Roman, Slavic and German.[76] According to some scholars, like Robert Matijasic, the immigration of the Slavs, especially Croats and Slovenians, should be considered the central event in the history of Istria. Matijasic considers this event reflects on the political and cultural aspect of the region

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[74] For more in-depth history of Istria, see: Dukovski, *Istra: Kratka Povijest Dugog Trajanja - Od Prvih Naseobina Do Danas (Istria: A Short History That Lasts for Long - From the First Settlements Until Today)*.

[75] Elvi Piršl, "Istra i Interkulturalni Odgoj (Istria and Intercultural Education)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 5, no. 5–6 (25–26) (September 1996): 895–911; Loredana Bogliun Debeljuh, *L'identità Etnica. Gli Italiani Dell'area Istro-quarnerina* (Rovinj-Trst: Centro di ricerche storiche, 1994).

[76] The view of the Roman rule is quite controversial with advocates of the view that it completely destroyed everything existing before it, and those arguing that it left many achievements of civilization and cultural monuments, some of which are visible in Istria to this day. [Matijašic, "Starija Povijest Istre i Neki Njezini Odrazi Na Novije Razdoblje (The Early History of Istria and Some Reflections on Modern Times)," 576.] However, the view that this period actually brought acculturation and such a mixture of cultures that a new way of life was produced is prevalent today. [R. F. Rossi, "La Romanizzazione Dell'lstria (The Romanization of Istria)," *Antichita Altoadriatiche* 2, no. 2 (1972): 77–78.]

nowadays as well.[77] The importance of this event lies in the radical change of the ethnic picture in Istria at that period.

Throughout most of its history in the Middle Ages and early modern period, Istria was divided between two rules – the Venetian Republic held coastal towns and cities, while the inland formed part of the Habsburg Empire. The region finally became united after the end of the Venetian Republic at the end of the 18th century, when the whole peninsula came under the Habsburg rule. It was followed by a short French rule under Napoleon between 1805 and 1813. In the subsequent years, Istria formed a part of four different states: the Austrian Empire (until the end of the First World War), the Kingdom of Italy (until the end of the Second World War), Yugoslavia (until its breakup at the beginning of the '90s), and nowadays the territory of Istria is divided between Croatia and Slovenia, with a large majority of the territory being in Croatia.

The period under the Fascist Italian rule in Istria was generally considered to be extremely harmful – both culturally and economically.[78] Economically, the region was sinking due to no financial investments, with Croatians holding no economic or political power.[79] Culturally, there is some evidence that during this time, the main aim of the Italian government was to change the "Istrian *etnicum*" and to achieve in as short time as possible

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[77] Matijašic, "Starija Povijest Istre i Neki Njezini Odrazi Na Novije Razdoblje (The Early History of Istria and Some Reflections on Modern Times)," 569–570. For more detailed overview, see Branko Marusic, *Istra u Ranom Srednjem Vijeku (Istria in the Early Middle Ages)* (Pula: Arheoloski muzej Istre, 1960). Marusic was the first one who researched the immigration of Croats to Istrian penninsula and his works are considered to be pioneer in this area, signifintly enriching the archeology of Istria.

[78] Ivan Beuc, *Istarske Studije: Osnovni Nacionalni Problemi Istarskih Hrvata i Slovenaca u Drugoj Polovini XIX. i Pocetkom XX. Stoljeca (The Istrian Studies: The Main National Issues of Istrian Croats and Slovenes in the Second Half of 19th and the Beginning of 20th Century)* (Zagreb: Sveucilišna naklada Liber, 1975); Darko Dukovski, "Gospodarska i Socijalna Problematika u Izvješcima i Vizitacijama Fašistickih Celnika u Istri 1925-1931 (u Okvirima Opce Fašizacije Istarskog Društva) (Economic and Social Issues in Reports and Visitations of Fascist Leaders in Istria, 1925-1931 (within the Framework of a General Fascization of the Istrian Society)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 2, no. 4–5 (6–7) (July 1993): 675–698; Claudio Silvestri, "Strutture e Forze Sociali e Politiche Nella Società Istriana Degli Anni 'Venti' (Social and Political Structures and Powers in the Istrian Society in the 'Twenties')," *Bollettino dell'Istituto Regionale Per La Storia Del Movimento Di Liberazione Nel Friuli Venezia Giulia* 5, no. 1 (1977): 28–33.

[79] Silvestri, "Strutture e Forze Sociali e Politiche Nella Società Istriana Degli Anni 'Venti' (Social and Political Structures and Powers in the Istrian Society in the 'Twenties')."

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complete denationalization and Italianization of Istria.[80] The forced assimilation was systematically conducted throughout the whole peninsula and it had significant influence on the region.[81] This influence can still be felt even today. Bilingual name boards and Italian flag next to the Croatian one can be found almost everywhere in Istria. Moreover, Italian language is in equal position with Croatian in official use in regional bodies (Article 6 of the Statute of the Istrian Region).[82]

Istrian tumultuous history is not the only specificity of the region. Another one is its extremely diverse demographic, linguistic and religious structure that is undeniably influenced by the events from Istria's history.

3.2. Demographics: The Multiethnic and Multilinguistic Character of Istria

One of Istria's specificities is the multi-ethnic character of the region.[83] Even though relatively small in size and population, Istria has been a home to many different ethnicities

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[80] Dukovski, "Gospodarska i Socijalna Problematika u Izvješcima i Vizitacijama Fašistickih Celnika u Istri 1925-1931 (u Okvirima Opce Fašizacije Istarskog Društva) (Economic and Social Issues in Reports and Visitations of Fascist Leaders in Istria, 1925-1931 (within the Framework of a General Fascization of the Istrian Society)," 688, 692–693; Hrvoje Mezulic and Roman Jelic, *O Talijanskoj Upravi u Istri i Dalmaciji: 1918.-1943.: Nasilno Potalijancivanje Prezimena, Imena i Mjesta (On Italian Rule in Istria and Dalmatia: 1918-1943: Violent Italianization of Surnames, Names and Places)* (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2005).

[81] As of 1923 street names and monuments were Italianized, foreign-language publications had to have Italian translation, many Croatian and Slovenian primary schools were converted to Italian-language, and while those teachers who kept teaching in Croatian or Slovenian were arrested, Slavic surnames had to be changed to sound more Italian, and various Slavic associations and organizations were shut down. However, despite the Italian politics of assimilation, Croats in Istria managed to keep their name, language and culture. [Professor Michael R. Ebner, *Ordinary Violence in Mussolini's Italy*, 1st ed. (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 189–190. For more see: Paolo Parovel, *Izbrisani Identitet (Erased Identity)* (Pazin-Porec-Pula: Matica Hrvatska, 1993); Vladimir Žerjavic, "Doseljavanja i Iseljavanja s Podrucja Istre, Rijeke i Zadra u Razdoblju 1910.-1971. (Immigration and Emigration from the Istria, Rijeke and Zadar Areas in the Period from 1910 to 1971)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 2, no. 4–5 (6–7) (July 1993): 631–656.; Stipan Trogrlic, "Istra Izmedu Klerikalizma i Liberalizma (kraj 19. i Pocetak 20. Stoljeca) (Istria Between Clericalism and Liberalism (The End of the 19th and Beginning of the 20th Century)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 2, no. 4–5 (6–7) (July 1993): 661–662.]

[82] *Statute of the Istrian Region*, *012-03/09-01/14*, 2009, http://www.istra-istria.hr/index.php?id=63.

[83] Nevertheless, the sum of people living in Istria is much lower today than it was at the beginning of the 20th century. 'Abandonment' is often emphasized as the basic characteristic of Istria after Croatia gained independence. This can be said to be the result of numerous political changes, but also two large post-war exoduses. [Saša Poljanec-Boric, "Zavicajni Park Istre (Od Regionalnog Problema Do Regionalnog Projekta) (Countryside Park of Istria (From Regional Probllem to Regional Project))," *Društvena Istraživanja* 1, no. 1

and cultures throughout history. The demographic picture of the region was significantly influenced by the two large exoduses before and after the Second World War. The Italian rule, marked by the violent fascist politics, assimilation and expatriation, resulted in a large exodus of the Croatian and Slovenian population in the twenties and thirties.[84] At the same time large number of Italians immigrated in the region. Ten years later, in the forties and fifties, a mass exodus of the Italian population took place. This time, the trigger was the unresolved state and legal status of Istria and the struggles for its unification with Croatia. These events brought significant demographic, political-economic and cultural changes to the region.[85]

Today, Istria is a home to numerous national minorities, with Italians and Slovenians having the status of autochthonous people (*autohtona nacionalna zajednica*), but it is also a home to numerous other ethnicities, including Albanians, Bosnians, Macedonians, Roma and Serbs, who have the status of national minorities.[86] They all bring their own specific cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious traditions. Therefore, it can be said that Istria represents 'pluricultural and plurilinguistic territory'.[87] Moreover, these socio-demographic characteristics shaped the relationship between different ethnicities in the peninsula, as well as between the regional and the national after Croatia declared its independence in 1991. The multinational character of Istria results in the region being a place of many languages. It is

(1992): 162.; Darko Dukovski, "Dva Egzodusa: Hrvatski (1919.-1941) i Talijanski (1943-1955.) (Two Exoduses: Croatian (1919-1941) and Italian (1943-1955))," *Adrias* no. 15 (December 2008): 129–165.]

[84] Dukovski, "Dva Egzodusa: Hrvatski (1919.-1941) i Talijanski (1943-1955.) (Two Exoduses: Croatian (1919-1941) and Italian (1943-1955))"; Darko Dukovski, "Model Egzodusa: Istarski Il Grande Esodo 1945.-1956. Godine. Uzroci i Posljedice (The Model of Exodus: The Istrian Il Grande Esodo 1945-1956. Causes and Consequences)" (presented at the Dijalog povjesnicara-istoricara, Zagreb: Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, 2002), 307–326.

[85] Bertoša, "Talijanski Etnicki Mikrokozmos u Istri: Izmedu 'Crne Rupe' i Antejske Opstojnosti (Italian Microuniverse in Istria: Between the 'Black Hole' and Antaeus Existence)."

[86] Darko Dukovski, "Nacionalne Manjine u Istri u 20. Stoljecu (The National Minorities in Istria in the 20th Century)" (presented at the Dijalog povjesnicara-istoricara, Zagreb: Friedrich Naumann Stiftung, 1999), 424–425. In relation to the status of autochtonous population, even though both Italians and Slovenians have such a status, only Italians have the right to open their schools and whose language is on a par with Croatian. This might not only be due to historical connections with Italy, but the fact that Italians are the second largest ethnicity after Croatians (According to the 2011 census, there is 25,203 Italians, or 12,11%, and 142,173 Croatians, or 68,33%). ["Popis Stanovništva, Kucanstva i Stanova 2011 (Census of the Republic of Croatia 2011)" (Drzavni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske (The Croatian Bureau of Statistics), 2011), http://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm.]

[87] Piršl, "Istra i Interkulturalni Odgoj (Istria and Intercultural Education)," 899.

interesting to add that this patchwork of languages was also labeled "the biggest language chaos in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy."[88] What makes such a big chaos in the region is not solely the variety of languages, but also various dialects and accents spoken in Istria.

The data from the 2011 census[89] best show the multiethnic and multilingual character of Istria. The percentage of Croatians is the lowest one out of all the regions in Croatia: there is only 68.33% of Croatians with four other ethnicities, namely Albanians, Bosnians, Serbs and Italians, counting over 1% of the total population in the region. While that is much less than in some other countries and regions, it is significant in the Croatian context. The second region with the smallest percentage of Croatians is Vukovarsko-Srijemska in the eastern part of Croatia, bordering Serbia. Here, there is 79.17% of Croatians; however the only other ethnicity numbering over 1% are Serbs, and that is due to historic reasons. The City of Zagreb, which is counted as a separate region, and for which one would expect to be very multiethnic, has 93.14% of Croatians, and only two other ethnicities over 1%, namely Bosnians and Serbs. The comparison between Istria and the City of Zagreb which proves Istria's multiethnicity is shown in Appendix 4. Another interesting statistic to look at is population by mother tongue. Even though less than 70% of people declared themselves to be Croat, 86.78% stated Croatian as their mother tongue. Furthermore, even though there are 6.03% of Italians, the percentage of those who stated Italian as their mother tongue was a bit higher, namely 6.83%. The statistical data from the Census best shows the process of acculturation which is a logical and expected result of the high level of interaction between all the different cultures in Istria. When it comes to religious identification, Istria is again the region with the smallest percentage of Catholics (75.08%,) when compared to other regions in the country, and the biggest diversity of other religions, with the other two major ones being Orthodox and Muslims.

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[88] Tone Peruško, *Razgovori o Jeziku u Istri* (Pula: Glas Istre, 1965), 11.
[89] "Popis Stanovništva, Kucanstva i Stanova 2011 (Census of the Republic of Croatia 2011)."

For such a small region as Istria, the number of different ethnicities, languages, religions and cultures is indeed astounding. It has also been used by regional leaders in promoting Istria as an extremely tolerant region with high respect for different minorities. These qualities are presented as an Istrian specificity and a typical characteristic of a true Istrian and together with the region's diversity have been emphasized as one of the main pillars in the construction of Istrian identity. Moreover, some scholars have been claiming the same thing as well, arguing that such a high level of tolerance in Istria can be attributed to the fact that throughout history, all of the ethnicities living in Istria found themselves as minority at one time.[90] Nevertheless, John Ashbrook made a research where he showed that many Istrians, just like non-Istrian Croats and their "Western" counterparts, had negative perceptions of people considered "balkan", and associated monoculturalism, ethnonationalism, and violent, aggressive, rude and uncultured behavior with the term.[91] Despite this, many Istrians seem to buy into the 'tolerant Istrian' myth, since when talking to them, many expressed their belief that people from Istria indeed are very tolerant and respectful of others.

3.3. The Construction of Istrian Regional Identity and Influential Actors

Strong promotion of Istrian identity is certainly not a new thing. Regional identitarian politics has been present in Croatia since its beginnings and independence proclaimed in 1991. Andelko Milardovic wrote in 1995 that regionalism is almost always a result of a strong centralization of a state, and that regional movements appear in unitarist and centralist states

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[90] Dukovski, "Nacionalne Manjine u Istri u 20. Stoljecu (The National Minorities in Istria in the 20th Century)," 411.

[91] Ashbrook, "Self-perceptions, Denials, and Expressions: Istrianity in a Nationalizing Croatia, 1990–1997."

that do not acknowledge the specificities of their regions.[92] The case of Istria is typical in Croatia. After declaring its independence in 1991, the country came under the leadership of President Franjo Tudman who was a somewhat authoritarian ruler and his ideas on how a national state should look like were deeply embedded in the nation-state building. His ideas on an extremely centralized, unified and homogenized country were met with skepticism in Istria. The new nationalizing policies also included a "new standardization" of the Croatian language, which included its purification from all the 'foreign' and non-Croatian words. It seems that these nationalist policies encouraged defiance in Istria, since they resulted in a revival of numerous non-standard varieties of idioms, instead of accepting the purified version of the new standard Croatian language, as well as strengthening of regional cultures and allegiance. Such events provided a perfect context for the development of a strong political regionalist movement and emergence of a regional identity that praises Istrian traditions of multiculturalism and multilingualism.

This strong political regionalist movement can be related to one more thing. Istria's history, marked with totalitarian Fascist rule, subordination and oppression, heavily influenced the way people from the region view and react to totalitarianism and centralization. According to Dukovski, when faced with totalitarian power, Istrians show signs of rejection, civil disobedience or even complete depoliticization.[93] Therefore, actions by Tudman and his party, Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) were seen as an alien nationalism form being imposed to the region. Such political actions may result in a quest for regional autonomy, federalization of the state or even separatism, depending on how strong the state pressure is. In Istria, they initially resulted only in regionalism and formation of strong regional identity, promoted by the regional party IDS-DDI. It is worth noting that such a regional identity was

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[92] Andelko Milardovic, *Regionalizam, Autonomaštvo, Federalizam Ili Separatizam? (Regionalism, Autonomy, Federalism or Separatism?)* (Osijek: Panliber, 1995), 14–15.
[93] Dukovski, "Model Egzodusa: Istarski Il Grande Esodo 1945.-1956. Godine. Uzroci i Posljedice (The Model of Exodus: The Istrian Il Grande Esodo 1945-1956. Causes and Consequences)," 310.

not necessarily exclusive of national identity. One could say that people in Istria developed a multiple identity, where allegiance to the region did not exclude feelings of being Croat or Italian, or any other nationality.[94] Such a regional identity can best be described in Fulvio Suran's term of "nationally weaker" identity which he defines as an identity that encompasses and values unity of diversity that has been believed to be Istrian reality.[95]

Nevertheless, this hybridity of Istrian identity did not influence on weakening of regionalist movement. This movement was represented by IDS-DDI that stood in opposition to HDZ, a party which represented the state promoted Croatian nationalism. According to Ivona Orlic, the reason for success and popularity of IDS-DDI in Istria lies in the fact that they managed to build an image of a party which protects the tradition and culture of region that managed to survive as an entity throughout its history.[96] Furthermore, the party managed to present itself as one working the hardest to protect and promote the region's interests, all of which has reflected in results of parliamentary elections. IDS-DDI has won majorities, and often even overwhelming majorities, in all parliamentary elections to date. The party's program is based on regionalism, and with or without a homogenizing central politics it dominates the region's politics and government. The electoral failure of HDZ in Istria led Istrians to be labeled as the prototype of unreliable Croats who are ethnically impure and politically not trustworthy, while Istrian identity was looked upon as something generally dubious.[97] Moreover, local media and politicians were significantly contributing, and they still

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[94] For surveys on regional self-identification in the 90's see: Banovac, "Etnicki Identitet i Regionalna Pripadnost - Primjer Istre (Ethnic Identity and Regional Affiliation - the Case of Istria)"; Banovac, *Društvena Pripadnost, Identitet, Teritorij. Sociološko Istraživanje Regionalne Pripadnosti u Istri (Social Belonging, Identity, Territory. Sociological Study of the Regional Belonging in Istria)*.

[95] Fulvio Suran, "Istrijanstvo Kao Slabiji (odnosno Jaci) Identitet (Istrianity as Weaker (or Stronger) Identity)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 2, no. 4–5 (6–7) (July 1993): 769–782.

[96] Ivona Orlic, "Contemporary Istrian Identity: Francis Blaškovic's 'Besidarenje' and His Contribution to the Construction of the Identity of Istriani/Istrians," *Narodna Umjetnost* 41, no. 2 (November 2004): 173; Dejan Jovic, "Regionalne Politicke Stranke (Regional Political Parties)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 1, no. 1 (September 1992): 173–188.

[97] Emilio Cocco, "Borderland Mimicry: Imperial Legacies, National Stands and Regional Identity in Croatian Istria after the Nineties," *Narodna Umjetnost* 47, no. 1 (2010): 14.

do, to the public perception that central government wants to marginalize and isolate the region. Politicians from HDZ reacted by accusing IDS for politicizing regional identity. Moreover, some scholars, like John Ashbrook, claim that Istria is a good example of how regional identities are politicized and used by politicians to promote their own interests.[98] Indeed, like many other things, identity in this case can be said to be used for the promotion of regional politicians' own interest.

Nevertheless, after Tudman's death, and with the 2000 parliamentary elections bringing the coalition of center-left parties in government position, the initial centralizing and homogenizing threat disappeared, and the new government promised to start working on the decentralization of Croatia. The difference was immediately felt in the number of people declaring themselves as 'Istrians'. In the 1991 census, 16.1% declared themselves as such, while in the 2001 census the percentage fell to only 4.3%.[99] It is worth noting that this percentage was still significantly higher than in any other region in Croatia. According to the newest census from 2011, that number rose again and 12.11% of people living in Istria declared themselves as 'Istrians' (25,203 inhabitants).[100] A significant rise in percentage can be seen, with the number of those self-identifying with the region coming closer to the data from 1991 than the data from 2000. It also needs to be pointed out that only one option could be chosen in the census, meaning that people had to decide between choosing their ethnicity and self-identifying in regional terms. This posed a serious issue for those who felt themselves to be both Istrians and Croats, a feeling shared by people with whom I talked, since they had to choose between the two. It is questionable what percentages would one get if there was the opportunity to circle multiple answers. Notwithstanding this, what could be read from the

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[98] Ashbrook, "Politicization of Identity in a European Borderland: Istria, Croatia, and Authenticity, 1990–2003."
[99] Orlic, "Contemporary Istrian Identity: Francis Blaškovic's 'Besidarenje' and His Contribution to the Construction of the Identity of Istriani/Istrians," 174.
[100] "Popis Stanovništva, Kucanstva i Stanova 2011 (Census of the Republic of Croatia 2011)."

statistics is that in 1991 and 2011 there were certain reasons for people putting their feeling of Istrianness above their feeling of Croaitanness.

A high percentage of regional self-identification in the 1990s can be, and often is, explained with the centralizing and nationalizing politics of Franjo Tudjman and the leading party HDZ.[101] In the same manner, the fall in that percentage in 2001 can be explained with the change in government and the victory of the central-left coalition on the elections, which promised bigger decentralization of the country. The argument goes something like this: Without the nationalizing threat of centrist party, people did not feel the need to distance themselves and reject the national politics; hence regional identity lost importance and fell into the background. Nevertheless, such an argument does not give an explanation for why the number of those who self-identified with the region increased so drastically in 2011. Reasons could be found in the recent global recession, and its economic consequences in Croatia, as well as unfulfilled promises on decentralization of the country, all of which also resulted in the resurgence of the quest for regional autonomy.

The main actor in promoting Istrian identity and autonomy is IDS-DDI. Distinctiveness of Istrian identity and the status of Istria as autonomous region in Croatia has been the main part of the party's program since its beginnings.[102] Party members are insisting on the separateness of Istrian identity and emphasize historical, cultural, economical, linguistic and demographic specificities of the region. Furthermore, they are calling for decentralization of Croatia and higher levels of self-administration of the Croatian regions. If that cannot be achieved, then they argue for asymmetric decentralization and freedom for Istria to decide locally on how to use the money it has. The standard argument goes: "Istria

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[101] Dukovski, "Model Egzodusa: Istarski Il Grande Esodo 1945.-1956. Godine. Uzroci i Posljedice (The Model of Exodus: The Istrian Il Grande Esodo 1945-1956. Causes and Consequences)"; Loredana Bogliun Debeljuh, "The Istrian Euroregion. Socio-cultural Situation and Problems," in *The Yugoslav War, Europe and the Balkans: How to Achievesecurity?*, by S. Bianchini and Paul Shoup, Europe and the Balkans International Network 1 (Ravenna: Longo, 1995).
[102] "IDS-DDI," accessed May 11, 2013, http://www.ids-ddi.com/.

earns a lot of money and is by far the richest Croatian region; however it gives most of it to the state and constantly gets back only part of what it rightly deserves; thus we need autonomy." Such a stance causes many angry reactions from politicians from other parties, who usually accuse Istrian politicians of promoting separatist ideas that threat the unity and sovereignty of the country. Dujomir Marasovic, the head of the HDZ branch in the Croatian coastal town Split called the idea of Istrian autonomy a "devil" one, stating: "Everyone has the right to their own dreams, but we are going to be ready to use even force if needed, in order to protect the territorial unity of the country … I acknowledge regional development as a civilization achievement, however destroying the country's unity is something I will not accept under any circumstances and using weapons is a legitimate means to prevent it!"[103] Such a view transports us back to the era of Franjo Tudjman and the 1990s when any sign of regional freedom to make decisions about its own business was looked upon suspiciously and as possibly threatening the country that finally managed to get its territory under one rue and achieved its long-wanted goal of gaining independence. Nevertheless, IDS-DDI politicians keep emphasizing that they have absolutely no separatist ambitions.[104]

Apart from IDS-DDI, there is another regional party calling for the autonomy of Istria, Istarski Socijaldemokratski Forum (eng. Istrian Social-democratic Forum), which is a regional center-left party.[105] The party was founded in 1996, and in the 2001 elections they took power in the city of Pula. According to popularity, the party is third in Istria, behind IDS-DDI and SDP (Social-Democratic Party). There are also some intellectuals who have been arguing for the existence of regional identity in Istria and whose ideas have been used as triggers for

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[103] Davor Krile, "'Autonomija Istre' Dujomir Marasovic: Silom Cemo Na Jakovcicevu Djavolsku Ideju," *Slobodna Dalmacija*, February 15, 2010, http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/Hrvatska/tabid/66/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/91902/Default.aspx.

[104] C.B. Galic, "Chiavalon: IDS Nema Separaticke Namjere (IDS Doesn't Have Separatist Intentions)," *GlasIstre.hr*, November 27, 2012, http://www.glasistre.hr/vijesti/pula_istra/chiavalon-ids-nema-separaticke-namjere-367334.

[105] "ISDF - FSDI | Istarski Socijaldemokratski Forum | Foro Socialdemocratico Istriano," accessed May 11, 2013, http://www.isdf-fsdi.hr/.

regionalism. The most prominent ones include historians Darko Dukovski and Giovanni D'Alessio who emphasize the specificities of Istrian history and many occurrences of cooperation between the populations of the peninsula which strengthened their collective stance towards pressures from the outside, state actors.[106]

When talking about regional identity, what is being mostly emphasized is the identity being a "blend of cultures of different ethnic groups" based on "multiculturalism and tolerance."[107] In addition, regional politicians like to stress the region's European character and its rightful position as a region in the 'Europe of the Regions'; hence it is important to look at the relationship between Istrian regionalism and Croatia's imminent accession to the EU.

3.4. Istrian Regionalism and Croatia's Accession to the European Union

It is indeed not strange that regional politicians in Istria make constant appeals to Europe and the EU, since this tactic is used by many regional politicians across Europe.[108] In the past two years, when it became quite clear that Croatia will join the EU club in 2013, IDS-DDI further strengthened its rhetoric on organizing referendum on the autonomy of Istria once the country becomes an EU Member State.

The most influential Istrian politician Ivan Jakovcic declared in an interview for the party's official website that Istria needs to be an autonomous region because without that "competitiveness of the Istrian region in comparison to the neighboring regions inside the EU,

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[106] Ashbrook, "'Istria Is Ours, and We Can Prove It': An Examination of Istrian Historiography in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," 25–27.
[107] Ashbrook, "Politicization of Identity in a European Borderland: Istria, Croatia, and Authenticity, 1990–2003," 459.
[108] Brusis, "European Union Incentives and Regional Interest Representation in Central and Eastern European Countries.", Batt and Wolczuk, *Region, State, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, 203–213. For more information on the challenges related to European integration that the countries in Central and Eastern Europe are facing, look in: [Keating and Hughes, *The Regional Challenge in Central and Eastern Europe*.]

especially the ones in Italy and Austria, is minimal."[109] It can be seen from his rhetoric that Jakovcic is playing on the EU card and that his aim is to present the membership in the EU as something that will bring many benefits to Istria, benefits that can be maximally used only if the region has autonomous status and gets to make decisions on its own issues without asking for any permissions the central government. Nevertheless, what Jakovcic keeps leaving out is the fact that in reality the influence of regions turned out to be very limited and largely dependent on their links to national governments, despite the 'Europe of the Regions' rhetoric. As already mentioned, Anderson and Goodman suggest that "both regionalism and 'Europeanization' are crucially conditioned by the continuing power of states,"[110] which have not disappeared, but simply adapted to the new and changing reality of global power and the shifting demands in the political arena. Therefore, it seems that the Istrian regional elites' constant presenting of Istrian autonomy as something that will give Istria more freedom in 'deciding its own destiny' and will be supported by the EU is more of a well-thought rhetoric to gain support from Istrians than it is something to be expected to happen in the reality.

As to Jakovcic's reference to Italian and Austrian regions, it is worth mentioning that in both cases not all the regions have benefited from the EU membership and not all regions have become equally competitive.[111] In the case of Italy, the opportunities opened to the regions after the European integration have certainly brought many benefits to the Italian regions, however there has been a significant asymmetry in their responsiveness to all the challenges of the European multilevel governance. Paolo Bilancia et al. argue how despite the remarkable role the EU played in the shaping of the development of Italian regionalism, it

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[109] "Regionalna Autonomija Istre Kljucno Pitanje Za IDS (The Regional Autonomy of Istria as a Key Question for IDS)," *IDS-DDI*, February 10, 2009, http://www.ids-ddi.com/it/m/1002/243/.

[110] Anderson and Goodman, "Regions, States and the European Union: Modernist Reaction or Postmodern Adaptation?," 601.

[111] Peter Mayerhofer and Gerhard Palme, "Effects of the EU's Eastern Enlargement on Austrian Regions," *Austrian Economic Quarterly* 7, no. 1 (2002): 40–50; Paolo Bilancia, Francesco Palermo, and Ornella Porchia, "The European Fitness of Italian Regions," *Perspectives on Federalism* 2, no. 2 (2010): 123–174.

should be noted that this role is sometimes "rather perceived than real."[112] Furthermore, the

EU funds are often not properly used in the less competitive regions; hence a lot of things

depend on the way the EU funds (e.g. the European Regional Development Fund) are used. In

the case of Austria, the regions that proved to be the most competitive and which benefited

the most are those dominated by companies strong on human capital in their economic

structure. On the other hand, rural regions have experienced increase in the competitive

pressure that was exerted on their economy.

That economic reasons may lead to strong regionalism is argued by some scholars as

well. According to Vjeran Katunaric, regionalism is a normal part of the postmodern nation-

state and can lead to the quest for autonomy not only for the reasons of linguistic and cultural

differences, but also due to economic and political-administrative reasons, in which case

regional leaders claim the right to a certain level of control of regional territory and its

resources.[113] Regionalism gained its strength with the rise of the idea of the 'Europe of the

Regions', especially popular in the '90s. However, time has shown that, despite many

scholars' enthusiastic discussion of the resurgence of regions and disappearance of the nation-

states, such an idea has proved to be simply a fancy rhetoric without any actual, substantial

meaning. Regions, therefore, remain very weak actors on the European scene.[114] Instead of

that, we are witnessing coexistence of different levels of governments which compete on

certain issues.[115] Notwithstanding the existence of multilevel governance, it has to be noticed

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[112] Bilancia, Palermo, and Porchia, "The European Fitness of Italian Regions," 127.

[113] Vjeran Katunaric, "Centar, Periferija i Regionalizam: 'Tvrda' Europska Postmoderna (Center, Periphery and Regionalism: A 'Hard' European Postmodernity)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 1, no. 1 (September 1992): 6.

[114] Le Gales and Lequesne, *Regions in Europe*; Borrás-Alomar, Christiansen, and Rodríguez-Pose, "Towards a `Europe of the Regions'? Visions and Reality from a Critical Perspective." However, it would be unfair to claim that European integration has had no impact on the regions. There are important economic and political impacts on the regions, and in many cases, European integration results in positive engagement where regions find a way to profit from it. At the same time, European integration has posed numerous political and constitutional challenges to regions. Not all regions manage to adjust themselves smoothly to the new context and territorial economic disparities can sometimes even be exacerbated. [Molle, van Holst, and Smit, *Regional Disparity and Economic Development in the European Community*.]

[115] Scharpf, "Community and Autonomy: Multi-level Policy-Making in the European Union"; Marks, "Structural Policy in the European Community"; Petschen, *La Europa de Las Regiones (The Europe of the Regions)*; Jones

that not all regions engage in political and lobbying activities equally. Therefore, it can be said that there is no guarantee that regional autonomy in itself would give Istria any real voice in the EU once Croatia becomes a Member State, a fact that regional leaders are never willing to admit when talking about regional autonomy and the EU.

Despite the fact that Istria as a region can significantly benefit from the Croatian membership in the EU and the EU regional funds, it can hardly be said that obtaining regional autonomy will completely exclude the national government from making decisions related to the region. Moreover, the competitiveness of the region and the level of benefit from the EU membership depend a lot on how the regional leaders will use those funds. Notwithstanding this fact, regional politicians keep referring to the European Union in their talks on regional autonomy for Istria. This autonomy, if achieved, arises important questions related to the political implications of Istria's autonomy on the decentralization process in Croatia.

3.5. The Quest for Autonomy and Political Implications

Central Europe, including Croatia, has a long and historic tradition of regionalism. Historical divisions of the country and several traditionally strong cultural centers of importance in Istria, Dalmatia and Slavonia throughout history have left a mark and today provide fertile ground for the development of regionalism. Notwithstanding this fact, some researchers like Mislav Jezic claim how despite the regional specificities of such regions, their interests and priorities should never come above the national ones.[116] According to him, regional development should be supported and encouraged, but with Zagreb as representative of all the regions staying the main center of the country and national interests and priorities

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and Keating, *The European Union and the Regions*; Keating and Hooghe; Hooghe and Marks, "'Europe with the Regions': Channels of Regional Representation in the European Union."
[116] Mislav Ježic, "Nešto Kulturoloških Razmišljanja o Regionalizmu u Hrvatskoj i Europi (Some Culturological Observations Concerning Regionalism in Croatia and Europe)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 1, no. 1 (1992): 13–24.

being the absolute number one. Scholars like Jezic seem to be trapped in believing that strong and autonomous regions will lead to weakening of the country that finally came to be unified and independent in the '90s. This fear of regionalism and regional autonomy undeniably has deep historical roots. Ivo Simunovic argues that throughout Croatia's history, foreign occupying forces have traditionally encouraged the ideas of regional autonomy as a part of further plans to incorporate those regions in their own territory.[117]

Sociologist Ivan Rogic, on the other hand, disagrees with such claims and sees no reason for fearing autonomous regions would compete with the state in terms of sovereignty, since the main goal of regions is to eliminate development inequalities.[118] Even though this is not true in every single case, it is undisputable that not every single quest for autonomy will lead to the quest for independence. In certain cases it might simply lead to requests for federalization of the country. Istrian politicians keep stressing how their aim is not the independence of the region and the creation of the state of Istria. In spite of these claims, there has been a controversial suggestion by an IDS party member, Ivan Pauletta, the initiator of the project "Zemlja Istra" (The Istra Country/Land) where he stated that it is "unquestionable and inalienable right of the people of Istria to self-determination, their right to independently decide their own fate."[119] He calls for regional autonomy, of which the boundaries will determine the people of Istria themselves, but they should in no case be forced to serve anyone, including their co-nationals. As controversial as this idea might be, rare are those who publicly supported Pauletta's claims. Even though there are signs that the Istrians living abroad are offering full support to the project, there were no voices from Istria so far which supported the idea. Furthermore, it cannot be said with certainty whether anything more than

[117] Ivo Šimunović, "Regionalni Koncept Razvitka Hrvatske - Kriticki Osvrt i Mišljenja (The Regional Concept of Development in Croatia - A Critical Review)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 1, no. 1 (1992): 47.
[118] Ivan Rogic, "Hrvatska i Njezine Regije (Croatia and Its Regions)," *Društvena Istraživanja* 1, no. 1 (September 1992): 25–35.
[119] "Projekt Zemlja Istra (The State/Land of Istria Project)," *AIM*, January 27, 1998, http://www.aimpress.ch/dyn/pubs/archive/data/199801/80127-032-pubs-zag.htm.

simple regional autonomy was on Pauletta's mind, since he himself stated in an interview later that IDS-DDI, of which he was the founder, was founded with the aim of achieving regional autonomy of Istria, and not establishing Istria as an independent state.[120] Therefore, the current state of affairs provides very little, or even nonexistent, evidence that regional autonomy of Istria will lead to the quest for the region's independence or eventual annexation to Italy.

Nevertheless, there are real questions arising from possible Istrian autonomy. The quest for regional autonomy certainly puts in question the current centralization of the country and the lack of political will to finally decentralize and put into practice the law on regional development. Even though centralism is not publicly acknowledged in Croatia, it can be easily recognized – the concentration of the capital, as well as economic and political decision-making are all centralized in Zagreb, which is considered to be the main center of the country.[121] This leads to the increase in differences between the center and peripheral regions. It also results in dissatisfaction with the way money is spent and which projects are given priority. That is also one of the main complaints of Istrian political leaders, who keep arguing that Istria is a "cash cow" in Croatia, giving more money than any other region, but receiving only part of what it rightly deserves.[122] Some scholars, like Simunovic, see even bigger problem with the way regional development is viewed in Croatia. He warns about the mistakes in the Croatian regional development politics, arguing that ill understanding and equalization of the two different forms of regionalization, namely the administrative one and

[120] "Pauletta: IDS Je Osnovan Zbog Autonomije, a Ne Odvajanja Od Hrvatske (Pauletta: IDS Is Established Because of Autonomy, and Not Division from Croatia)," *Istarski.hr*, February 4, 2012, http://www.istarski.hr/node/1737.

[121] Šimunovic, "Regionalni Koncept Razvitka Hrvatske - Kriticki Osvrt i Mišljenja (The Regional Concept of Development in Croatia - A Critical Review)," 47.

[122] "Klub Mladih IDS-a: Istra Nije Krava Muzara (The IDS Youth: Istria Is Not a Miliking Cow)," *Regional Express - Online Magazin*, October 2, 2008, http://regionalexpress.hr/site/more/klub-mladih-ids-a-istra-nije-krava-muzara/; "Istra Krava Muzara - Stvorimo 3 Milijarde Eura, a Vracaju Nam Mrvice (Istria Is Not a Milking Cow - We Make 3 Billion Euros, but We Get Back Only Pieces)," *Istra News*, October 10, 2012, http://www.istranews.in/article/2494/istra-krava-muzara-stvorimo-3-milijarde-eura-a-vracaju-nam-mrvice.html.

the developmental one, causes many problems with viewing regionalization as undesirable and even threatening national interests.[123] In addition, the question arises as to how other regions would react to Istria's autonomy. Even though there are no indicators currently that regionalism is strong in any other Croatian region, Istria's autonomy could trigger similar responses from other regions, which might lead to the possible federalization of what was once strongly unified and centralized country.

Since those are many "what if-s", it is hard to properly discuss them. What is undeniably certain is that Istria's autonomy poses many questions to the national government, questions which cannot be postponed anymore and which need to be dealt with. If (when?) Istria achieves regional independence it will not pass without any implications. Nevertheless, what can also be said is that there has been no indication so far that Istria's autonomy will lead to the region's secession from Croatia, nor that it will jeopardize "the unity and the existence of the country". What Istria's autonomy will trigger is long-awaited decentralization of the country, which is nothing anyone should fear from.

In sum, the aim of this chapter was to explain Istra's regional specificities through the region's historical turbulences and changes, and also its demographic diversity; to identify influential actors in promoting and constructing regional identity; and to describe how the quest for regional autonomy is connected to Croatia's accession to the EU and also the possible implications of such a quest on the whole country. These topics are all important since they provide better insight into why Istria is an important region in Croatia to research. Furthermore, they give a good introduction into the empirical part of the thesis, where I research the emergence of regional identitarian politics and the effects of such rhetoric on the identification of the locals, in the light of Croatia's expected accession to the European Union.

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[123] Šimunovic, "Regionalni Koncept Razvitka Hrvatske - Kriticki Osvrt i Mišljenja (The Regional Concept of Development in Croatia - A Critical Review)."

In the following chapter, I carry out discourse analysis of some interviews and statements of Ivan Jakovcic, with the aim of identifying the main ideas he and his party are promoting. Subsequently, I analyze individual semi-structured qualitative interviews with people living in the region.

4.   The Interviews and the Research Results

The first part of this thesis presents a theoretical background that offers analysis of the key concepts related to identity, regional identity and regionalism. A small part was also dedicated to discussing the overpriced role of the EU in promoting regionalism and the way the pro-regional politicians are using European integration in their pro-autonomy rhetoric. In addition, by analyzing Istria's regional specificities that make it quite a unique region in Croatia this study already shed some light on how that could reflect on self-identification of the locals and the construction of Istrian identity.

This part of the thesis presents empirical research on the identity building in Istria and analyses the results. The purpose of the empirical research is to study the emergence of regional identitarian politics, and the impact of such rhetoric on the perceptions and identification of the locals, in the light of Croatia's expected accession to the European Union. By analyzing identity building both 'from above' and 'from below' I give a more complete picture of the identity building in Istria. In the following section, a critical discourse analysis of the interviews and speeches by the main leader of IDS-DDI, Ivan Jakovcic, is done. Subsequently, individual semi-structured interviews with the people living in the region are analyzed.

4.1.   Analysis of the Politics from 'Above'

When analyzing the 'top-down' approach, I focus on examining Jakovcic's identity building project, and the nature of his idea of Istrianness. My main question is whether Jakovcic is promoting it as a cultural identity or a territorial one, as a separate identity or a nested one? For identifying the motives behind such a prominent call on developing Istrian identity and possible factors that lie behind their quest for autonomy and broader support for

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it, chosen interviews, statements and speeches by Jakovcic, in the period since 2000 are analyzed. According to Ruth Wodak, critical discourse analysis can explain how discourse influences social identity, social relations, as well as knowledge systems and value systems.[124] In the present study Ruth Wodak's and Theo van Leeuwen's approach to CDA are combined.

4.1.1. Analysis of Research Results: "Istria as a Unique Region With a Strong Identity and Recognizable Values, With the Right to Autonomous Status"

There are different views of what actually constitutes Istrianity. Ivan Jakovcic, the leader of IDS-DDI, defined it in the following terms: "Something that maybe is less deep and strong than the national identity but does not exclude other dimensions […] the multiculturalism and pluri-lingualism of Istria that I experience everyday between Pazin and Pore, when I know exactly to whom to say: 'Dobar dan' or 'Buon giorno', to whom to say: 'Dio' or 'Bog'."[125] However, several things are being mentioned frequently by various promoters of Istrian identity. According to Ashbrook, Istrians are being shown as different from other Croats, both culturally and mentally, because of their multiculturality, proximity to Western and Central Europe, historical peculiarities as well as hibridity.[126] Furthermore, he writes that Istrians argued that they were more European than other Croats, and that due to their multiculturality, historic tradition of being tolerant, as well as desire for decentralization they were much closer to mentality of Western Europe. This making of a group, a distinct entity, is best described by Bourdieu, who suggested that

> Struggles over ethnic or regional identity are a particular case of different struggles over classifications, struggles over the monopoly of the power to make people see and

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[124] *Qualitative Discourse Analysis in the Social Sciences*, 2.
[125] Cocco, "Borderland Mimicry: Imperial Legacies, National Stands and Regional Identity in Croatian Istria after the Nineties," 15.
[126] Ashbrook, "Politicization of Identity in a European Borderland: Istria, Croatia, and Authenticity, 1990–2003," 879.

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believe, to get them to know and recognize, to impose the legitimate definition of the divisions of the social world... to *make and unmake groups*.[127]

Establishing Istrians as a distinctive group has been an ongoing process by the main regional political party. Analyzing statements by Ivan Jakovcic, the president of IDS, one can easily single out the values he believes to be central to Istrian identity, and that make Istrians unique. Multi-ethnicity, multilingualism, multiculturality and tolerance have been integral part of the region for centuries. Not a single statement or speech on regional identity and autonomy go without it. Jakovcic is very careful in choosing his words and he takes into consideration Istrian multi-ethnic character, so that no one is felt left out when he speaks of regional identity. By doing this, he makes sure that he will gain support not only by Croats living in Istria, but also by other nationalities. In a 2008 interview, Jakovcic stated:

> Today, Istrianity includes a national value that every individual lives in his/her daily life: everyone speaks in his/her own language, and I am convinced that, thanks to this logic that does not exclude, there is no danger of Istrian assimilation or exclusivity. … People feel as being Istrians and they want to be accepted as such, without it being exclusive of the national identity, nor Croatian or Italian, or any other. Some people say that it is hard for a Serbian or Bosnian to become Istrian. I say something else: everyone who accepts the values of Istrian identity, the values of our tradition, as well as modern values we have, is an Istrian.[128]

In constructing the sense of belonging to the Istrian region, Jakovcic is using traditional values from the region's history, stressing the inheritance of anti-fascism.[129] He builds an image of a traumatic common history that gave birth to a new unique, Istrian way of life that he calls 'complete inter-ethnic toleration'[130]. The motif of a common history that is never to be forgotten is used quite often by Jakovcic. For him, that is the reason why Croatian or Serbian nationalism never found their way in the region. Nevertheless, such claims lead to homogenization of the group, presupposing that every 'Istrian' shares this history and Istrian

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[127] Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass: Polity Press, 1991), 221.

[128] Aleksandra Šucur, trans., "Multikulturalizam, Istarsko Naslijede (Multiculturalism, the Istrian Heritage)," *Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso*, July 2, 2008, http://www.osservatoriobalcani.org/index.php/article/articleview/10156/1/394/?PrintableVersion=enabled.

[129] "Istra Medu Najzanimljivijim Regijama Europe (Istria Among the Most Interesting Regions in Europe)," July 1, 2010, http://nino4zupan.com/novosti/istra-medu-najzanimljivijim-regijama-europe/.

[130] Šucur, "Multikulturalizam, Istarsko Naslijede (Multiculturalism, the Istrian Heritage)."

values, and that there are no intolerant or nationalist people living in Istria. Despite the fact

that he is constantly using the motif of diversity, he actually manages to homogenize the

people living in Istria, as if they have the same beliefs, ideas and feeling, which is exactly

what Brubaker's concept of groupness is about.[131]

Using motifs of history, geography and culture is a common thing in building a

regional identity. According to Dimitri Bechev, they are inextricably linked, contested and

politicized.[132] They provide a fertile ground for politicians who want to construct such an

identity. Orlic writes how regional identity can appear only where history, geography and

culture have made fertile ground for it.[133] And that is exactly the case in Istria, where space

and belonging are interpreted by the most relevant political actor, Jakovcic, in a way that the

whole concept of Istrian identity revolves around an attempt to present Istria and its people as

a unique group whose history, geography and culture are giving them the right to ask for

regional autonomy.

Furthermore, Jakovcic posits Istria as the strongest region in Croatia. He builds an

image of a region that is "modern, open and economically competitive, with recognizable

cultural and natural heritage, high social standard and all of it incorporated in a balanced and

sustainable development."[134] He wants to sell Istria as a story of success, a region that is

number one in many things.[135] By doing this, his aim is to connect the feelings of pride, of

being unique and special, to Istrian identity. Belonging to such a special group makes one feel

special and cultivates a positive image of oneself. In Tajfel's view, as already mentioned, such

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[131] Brubaker and Cooper, "Beyond Identity."
[132] Bechev, "Contested Borders, Contested Identity: The Case of Regionalism in South-east Europe," 84.
[133] Orlic, "Contemporary Istrian Identity: Francis Blaškovic's 'Besidarenje' and His Contribution to the Construction of the Identity of Istriani/Istrians," 173.
[134] Darko Lorencin, ed., "Regionalni operativni program 2006-2010 (Regional Operational Programme)" (Istarska razvojna agencija (IDA) d.o.o., 2005), 3, http://www.ida.hr/fileadmin/sadrzaji/datoteke/ROP.pdf.
[135] "Ako Država Ne Financira Bolnicu, Tražit Cu Regionalnu Autonomiju Istre (If the State Does Not Finance the Hospital, I Will Demand Regional Autonomy of Istria)," April 6, 2012, http://nino4zupan.com/intervju/ako-drzava-ne-financira-bolnicu-trazit-cu-regionalnu-autonomiju-istre/.

positive evaluations of a group become a source of pride and self-esteem for an individual.[136] Therefore, constructing such a highly positive image of Istria makes it easier for people to relate to it and internalize the feeling of being a true Istrian.

All of this makes Istria one of the most interesting regions of Europe, according to Jakovcic. He posits Istria as a European region, as a region whose multiculturalism, diversity and tolerance, together with cultural, political and human values give her a European future. He views Istria as the most successful and the best European region, a region that is going to be "Europe's pride."[137] Jakovcic said in one interview that he is "convinced that with this model, this concept, Istria can live European future, the future of our planet."[138] When talking about Istria as a European region, he always mentions Istrian successful tourism, distinctive and recognizable cuisine, as well as beautiful nature. In all of this, the region distinguishes itself from its neighbors and becomes a part of Europe. However, this is a typical decades-long desire of the whole country, to present itself as a European country, instead of a Balkan one, and is in no way applicable only to Istria. Likewise, many regional movements in general seek a 'return to Europe'.[139] Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk wrote in collection of essays they edited how regionalist elites argue for a European nature of their identities and the connectedness their region has to a wider Europe, all of which is much weaker in the case of their nationally oriented neighbors.[140]

From this example, we can also clearly see a distinction between the categories of 'us' and 'them', 'civic' and 'ethnic'. Due to an often negative connotation given to the word 'nationalism', Jakovcic does everything in his power to present Istrian regional movement and

[136] Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories*, 254–267.

[137] "Istra Medu Najzanimljivijim Regijama Europe (Istria Among the Most Interesting Regions in Europe)."

[138] Šucur, "Multikulturalizam, Istarsko Naslijede (Multiculturalism, the Istrian Heritage)."

[139] Judy Batt, "Introduction," in *Region, State, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk, The Cass Series in Regional and Federal Studies (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 4; Judy Batt, "Reinventing Banat," in *Region, State, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Judy Batt and Kataryna Wolczuk, The Cass Series in Regional and Federal Studies (London: Frank Cass, 2002), 203.

[140] Batt and Wolczuk, *Region, State, and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe*.

identity as civic, as a 'good one'. "We experience affiliation to Istria as a civic affiliation, it definitely is not a national one, or God forbid a nationalistic one; it is open and high,"[141] claims he. When presented as such, it does not sound so exclusivist as it would otherwise, and it is in accordance with Istrian identity as an inclusive of diversity. This, of course, is the language of many regionalists and some scholars of regionalism, as Ashbrook noted. Moreover, by doing this he posits Istrian regionalism with a multicultural local pattern as being at odds with other regionalisms that are based on nationalistic discourse. Another way to distance Istrian regional movement from other regional movements is by emphasizing that the liberal-left orientation the Istrian one is based upon, as opposed to the rightist character of others.[142]

This last point is very important when discussing Istria's right to autonomy, something that almost always accompanies the talk on Istrian identity. Jakovcic emphasized several times that Istria does not want to achieve autonomy through violence, like many other regionalist movements did or tried to do, but that they see their opportunity in Croatia's entering the EU. Nevertheless, during the central-left government rule in the period of 2000-2003, Jakovcic threatened with defending Istria's autonomy even if it includes incidents.[143] And indeed, threatening with autonomy and referendum on autonomy is not unusual for Jakovcic. Whenever there is a quarrel on financial issues, Jakovcic threatens with autonomy, arguing that Istria is constantly being neglected and treated unjustly by the central government.

> The inhabitants of Istria cannot and do not want to put up with being ignored like this! Why would we be first in everything in this country, and when the time comes for it to

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[141] "Jakovcic: Istra Ce Postati Županija s Posebnim Ovlastima," *GlasIstre.hr*, March 31, 2012, http://www.glasistre.hr/vijesti/arhiva/jakovcic-istra-ce-postati-zupanija-s-posebnim-ovlastima-350856.
[142] "Ivan Jakovcic: Autonomija Istri Kad Udemo u EU (Autonomy for Istria When We Enter EU)," *iPazin.net*, August 23, 2008, http://www.ipazin.net/?p=1473.
[143] "Idemo Na Referendum o Autonomiji Istre," April 6, 2010, http://nino4zupan.com/intervju/idemo-na-referendum-o-autonomiji-istre/.

give, better to say, give back, to Istria, then we come last. … Patience of the people of Istria is coming to its end.[144]

However, when asked about concrete measure they are ready to take, Jakovcic does not want to speak. The only thing he reveals is announcing and holding a referendum, with certainty that he can get 80% of Istrians on his side. Jakovcic publicly presents high level of centralization in Croatia as the main problem for the development of Istria. In order to dispose its money, an agreement with the central government needs to be made, and to make his point, he cleverly uses the example of projects Istria cannot carry out without the support from central government (e.g. hospital, university, infrastructure), knowing that such things are of great importance for people. Moreover, as already mentioned, Jakovcic sells a picture of economically self-sustainable Istria that profits from tourism, industry, agriculture and service sector. Such Istria, according to him, has enough money to finance its own projects.[145] Therefore, cultural and financial autonomy would solve all Istria's problems. This is in accordance with Keating's claim that well-developed territories tend to favor decentralization.[146] Furthermore, he argued that struggles "over power and control of resources … heightened the sense of territory and its political salience," giving regional actors ability to challenge the central government.[147] We can see exactly the same thing happening in Istria, where there is a fight over power between the central government and Istrian regional party, with IDS constantly challenging the central government.

Even though the case of Istria is far from being viewed as a secessionist one (despite the fact there are people who think different), it is no less interesting. Since Croatia will become a member of the EU in July, many are impatiently expecting what actions and concrete steps IDS will make. Moreover, the results of the 2011 census have again shown the

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[144] Ibid.
[145] "Ako Država Ne Financira Bolnicu, Tražit Cu Regionalnu Autonomiju Istre (If the State Does Not Finance the Hospital, I Will Demand Regional Autonomy of Istria)."
[146] Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*, 108.
[147] Michael Keating, *State and Regional Nationalism: Territorial Politics Andthe European State* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), 22.

increase in the number of people self-identifying with the region (12.11%).[148] What is poorly analyzed is the level of the support for autonomy, an issue which will be discussed later in this chapter.

4.1.2. The Possible Reasons for Istrian Identity

Iver Neumann stated that political actors invent regions as a political program and regional identity is what people, politicians and states make out of it.[149] According to Bechev, such a post-structural approach puts forward regions as an imagined community built by political actors, who use regionalism to define 'us' against 'them', represented by another imagined community.[150] What can one conclude about the motives lying behind the construction of Istrian identity by the leading regional party, IDS?

First, there are certainly economic motives lying behind promotion of Istrian identity and quest for autonomy. Jakovcic is referring to the financial issue in almost every statement he makes, and he is very explicit about the issue of money redistribution. It is hard to tell how close to the truth his statements about only 13% of profit Istria makes staying in Istria, but it is true that Croatia remains a highly centralized country where most money goes to Zagreb, its capital. Despite loud calls for stronger decentralization, it is questionable when that will actually happen. This is not unique to Istria, as today one can witness a wave of economic separatism surging throughout Europe.[151] Moreover, according to Paasi, politicians and entrepreneurs "strive to create new symbolic meanings to localities and regions to promote their economic success … 'culture' is one of the keywords in this place promotion, where

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[148] "Popis Stanovništva, Kucanstva i Stanova 2011 (Census of the Republic of Croatia 2011)."

[149] Iver Neumann, "Regionalism and Democratisation," in *Democratic Consolidation in Eastern Europe*, ed. Jan Zielonka and Alex Pravda, vol. 2, 2 vols., Oxford Studies in Democratization (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 58–75.

[150] Bechev, "Contested Borders, Contested Identity: The Case of Regionalism in South-east Europe," 84.

[151] Ryan Barnes, "Catalonia and the Rise of Economic Separatism in Europe," *Fair Observer°*, November 16, 2012, http://www.fairobserver.com/article/catalonia-and-rise-economic-separatism-europe.

local resources and culture are transformed into a selective heritage."[152] This can be applied to Istria, where IDS is trying to promote the Istrian 'story of success', and even more after gaining autonomous status, when Istria will be able to dispose with its own money as it pleases. Here we come to the second motive that is more implicit.

The second motive lying behind IDS' politics is the interest of a majoritarian group to maximize their politic influence. Right now, IDS needs to consult the central government for every bigger decision they make. If they want to build a new hospital in Istria, they need to consult the central government. And the same goes for any big project requiring larger amounts of money. In the case of autonomy, that step could be avoided and IDS could make its own decisions on what to do and when to do it. Jakovcic has been mentioning that autonomy would bring Istrian people the ability to make their own decision on how to spend the money they earned; however, in reality it would not be the Istrian people who would make such decisions, but the minority elite that would, most probably, work in their own interest. According to Keating, regional leaders politicize identity to their own benefit that often time results in building a movement strong enough to compete with nationalizing and centralizing forces.[153] This was especially true during the Tudman era, but it can be applied today as well.

Cocco would probably argue that IDS is doing well in selling Istrian identity, stating that due to a complex history of the region "the inhabitants of Istria would be probably ready to support all practices of citizenship that promote their social and economic safety, independently from nationality but not necessarily against it."[154] I would be more careful when giving such a judgment. Istria has not been that neglected by the central government, and the new government made more promises on decentralization of the country. Even though

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[152] Paasi, "Re-constructing Regions and Regional Identity," 7.
[153] Michael Keating, "Is There a Regional Level of Government in Europe?," in *Regions in Europe*, ed. Patrick Le Gales and Christian Lequesne, European Public Policy Series (London: Routledge, 1998), 25.
[154] Cocco, "Borderland Mimicry: Imperial Legacies, National Stands and Regional Identity in Croatian Istria after the Nineties," 24.

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the number of Istrians self-identifying with the region has risen, probably due to economic crises and its consequences on Croatia, I would argue, on the basis of my interviews with the locals, that not enough people would vote for autonomy of the region, yet. Nevertheless, I do believe IDS is doing a decent job in promoting regional identity, and if some moves in the direction of decentralization do not happen soon, it is indeed very likely that in the near future Istria could become an autonomous region in Croatia.

4.2. Semi-structured Interviews and Methodological Questions

The first part of the empirical research focused on the 'top-down' approach, by doing an analysis of the rhetoric of the main regional leader in Istria, Ivan Jakovcic. Because the construction of regional identity in Istria does not depend solely on the role of political leaders and elites, but also on the way people themselves internalize and project such an identity, it was necessary to use a 'bottom-up' approach as well. In order to study the social realities provoked by rhetoric of the regional political leaders and the everyday experience of the local people, I carried out individual semi-structured qualitative interviews with people living in the region. The main focus of the research is the congruence of people's self identification with the regional identification strongly promoted by the leading regional party, IDS, as well as their level of support for the autonomy of Istria. The thesis also addresses differences and similarities between self-identification of local people from different generations.

In the following sections, I detail the structure of the interviewed subjects by place of origin, sex and age, and I go on to explain what were the limits and the hypotheses of the research. Subsequently, I explain the structure of the interview questionnaires and the way they relate to the main questions of this study. I conclude the chapter on the empirical research by presenting the findings of the study and an analysis of the research results.

4.2.1. Subjects and Method of the Interviews

The aim of the research was to collect qualitative data on regional self-identification in Istria. For this purpose, I conducted semi-structured interviews, which are a useful tool in the research of the perception and construction of identities, since they offer a deeper understanding of identity, politics and group dynamics. This method helped me with examining narratives on regional identity and whether regional identification is inclusive or exclusive regarding the other existing types of identification. Moreover, I examined how strong the support for bigger decentralization of Croatia in its richest region is. All the interviews were conducted throughout the month of April 2013.

The participants of the research were local people from Istria, and I used random sampling when choosing the ones for interviewing. Many people were unwilling to participate in the research, especially among those belonging to the older generations. Nevertheless, I managed to achieve the targeted number of 30 interviewees. However, in order to protect their anonymity, I use pseudonyms in the present thesis. Since I was interested to find out whether there are any differences between self-identification of the younger and the older generations, I divided the participants into those born before 1981, and those who were born after. The reason for that is that those born before 1981 had the experience of living in two different countries, both the Yugoslavian one and the Croatian one, while those born after spent large majority of their life living in the independent country of Croatia. All of them are Croatians by nationality, however some of them have Italian heritage.

The intention of the research was to reach a similar number of male and female, as well as younger and older interviewees in order that no group is overrepresented in the study. Out of 30 participants, there were seven male and nine female interviewees who were born before 1980; and six male and eight female interviewees born after 1981. Altogether, there

were 13 male and 17 female interviewees, 16 born before 1981 and 14 after 1981. The number and structure of the participants was chosen to be as similar as possible to the overall structure of the population.[155] Due to time limits and unwillingness of many locals to participate in the research, the sample does not reflect the census statistics perfectly. However, this does not present a problem since the aim of the research is not to generalize.

The participants are from different towns and cities in Istria, namely Buzet (10), Bale (6), Pula (6), Porec (3), Labin (1), Rovinj (1), Pazin (1), Tinjan (1) and Vodnjan (1). According to the 2011 census[156], out of these places, the highest percentage of those expressing their Istrianness was in Tinjan (22.27%), Labin (17.63%), Pazin (15.99%) and Buzet (15.80%). The lowest percentage was in Pula (7.23%) and Bale (7.45%). The reason for not focusing solely on one or two places was my interest in hearing various narratives on regional self-identification, irrespective of the place of origin of the interview subjects.

The structure of subjects interviewed in Istria according to the place of origin, sex and age is graphically presented in Table 1:

Place of origin	Male		Female		Interviews
	< 34	> 35	< 34	> 35	
Bale			3	3	**6**
Buzet	2	4	3	1	**10**
Labin	1				**1**
Pazin		1			**1**
Porec		1		2	**3**
Pula	2		2	2	**6**
Rovinj		1			**1**
Tinjan				1	**1**
Vodnjan	1				**1**

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[155] Statistically, women have slightly higher share than man in the whole population of the region – 51% of women as opposed to 49% of men. Furthermore, when looking at the age structure, one can see significantly higher percentage of older population (62%), than the younger one (38%). ["Popis Stanovništva, Kucanstva i Stanova 2011 (Census of the Republic of Croatia 2011)" (Drzavni zavod za statistiku Republike Hrvatske (The Croatian Bureau of Statistics), 2011), http://www.dzs.hr/default_e.htm.]
[156] Ibid.

Place of origin	Male		Female		Interviews
	< 34	> 35	< 34	> 35	
Total	6	7	8	9	30
Total according to gender	13		17		
Total <34	14				
Total >35	16				

Table 1: The structure of interviewed subjects according to the place of origin, sex and age

4.2.2. Research Limits and Hypotheses

The initial intention was to try to do such an exhaustive research in order to be able to make generalizations which could be comparable with the research done on Istrian identity before the year 2000. However, such research was not possible due to time and financial constraints, which did not enable me to collect the representative sample of the two biggest ethnicities in the region, namely Croatian and Italian, and even less so a representative sample of all the ethnicities living in the region. Therefore, I decided to make such a research where the aim is not to make any generalizations, but focus on the different narratives on regional self-identification of the peoples. Moreover, due to time constraints, I focus solely on Croats living in Istria, leaving the issue of regional identity among other ethnicities living in the region for further research.

Another problem was that many people were unwilling to respond to my questions despite my promises that the interviewees' names will not be used in the thesis. Moreover, a large number of people, including both the younger and the older generations, were reluctant to respond without even hearing the questions; on the mention that the research is about regional self-identification they expressed their unwillingness to be a part of it.

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My initial expectations were that there will be differences in self-identification with the region between different generations in Istria. Taking into consideration the historical border changes in Istria, it could have been anticipated that the older generations have stronger regional self-identification than the younger ones. Moreover, due to the culturally and ethnically diverse character of the region, it could have been expected that regional self-identification is not exclusive of other identifications; and that it does not necessarily correlate with stronger preferences for decentralization of Croatia.

4.2.3. The Structure of Interviews

This thesis adopts an inter-disciplinary approach of history, sociology and political science to answer the relevant questions. The main question of this study is: have local people in Istria developed regional identity feelings in the way political elites are trying to promote it and to what extent is that identity meaningful in everyday life. In addition to this, there are several other important questions this thesis addresses. Is this regional identification, where it exists, inclusive or exclusive regarding other existing identifications and is there a difference in the strength of identification between different generations? Moreover, how does this identity correlate with the support for the autonomy of Istria and with the preferences for decentralization of Croatia?

In order to find the answers to these questions, I conducted semi-structured interviews with the locals. The interview questions were formulated around four main pillars, which also helped me in the analysis of the results. Every pillar was consisted of a group of questions which were used to help me find out the answer to the main question of that pillar. The questionnaire consisted of 30 questions which were used as a guideline during the research. Most were covered with all the interviewed subjects; however some interviewees were

reluctant to answer to some questions, or to answer to them in more detail. Nevertheless, the overall quality of the responses was quite satisfying.

The theme of the first pillar was "Personal vs. Collective Identity", with the main question: How does a person identify himself/herself? Here, it was important to find out with what people identify themselves and how exclusive/inclusive is that identity. It was also used to see whether certain type of identity jumps to the forefront in certain occasions. The questions included the following:

1. When you think about the place you come from, Istria, Croatia and Europe, can you tell me how close do you feel to them? Which one is the one you feel closest to? Can you explain why this is so?

2. We think of ourselves in different terms, giving more significance to some than to the others. Which ones are the most important to you when you are describing yourself (occupation, gender, age group, religion/atheist/agnostic, ethnic group, social class, place you come from/live in, preferred political party, group or movement, national group, being Istrian, being European)? Why is(are) that term(s) so important to you?

3. What comes to your mind when you hear "Lijepa naša domovino"/Our Beautiful Homeland (Croatian anthem)?

4. What comes to your mind when you hear "Krasna zemljo, Istro mila"/Oh, Lovely and Gracious Land of Istria (Istrian anthem)?

The "Embeddedness of Regional Identity" is the main theme of the second pillar, with the main question being: How has regional identity been constructed? Here, the intention was to find out more about the discursive construction of identity of the local people, but not simply as a response to elite dictates. Instead, I was interested in how self-identification resonates with contingencies of everyday life. This pillar included the following questions:

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5. What language(s) are spoken within your family?

6. What language(s) do you speak at work/university, with friends and neighbours?

7. What kind of literature do you mostly read and in which language? How important do you think is to read works written by Istrian novelists and poets (e.g. Vladimir Nazor, Mate Balota, Drago Orlic, Milan Rakovac, Daiel Nacinovic, Drago Gervais, Fulvio Tomizza, Miroslav Bertosa)?

8. Which media do you follow (national, regional/local, ethnic minority group) and how often?

9. With whom do you spend most of your time (people from your village/town, Croatians/Italians/other nationalities, etc.)? What are your friendship/kinship networks?

10. What do you think about IDS-DDI and Ivan Jakovcic?

11. How do you view Jakovcic's position on Istria?

12. Are you a part of any group/party/activist organization? If yes, what are their main preoccupations?

The third pillar focuses on "Assessing affective, behavioral, cognitive and attitudinal aspects of one's self-identification" and seeks to answer to the question: How important is regional self-identification in everyday life of people? Here, I wanted to find out whether and how people express their (regional) identity in everyday life and how do local people engage and interpret – and ignore and deflect – popular meaning and resonance of symbols (e.g. flags and anthems). The questions included in this pillar are the following:

13. When we talk about belonging, how proud are you of being Croat/Istrian/European?

14. How do you view Istria? Has the meaning of the region changed after the events of 1991 and how?

15. What do you like about living in Istria? What is the best thing about living here? What are you proud of in Istria? Is there something you do not like?

16. If you got the opportunity to go to another part of Croatia/another country, would you go or not? Why?

17. What does it mean to you to be Istrian/Croatian? Would you say you are more Istrian than Croatian? How would you even describe a 'typical Istrian'?

18. How do you feel about Istria's success in tourism? Who do you think should take the most credit for it's success?

19. What do you think of traditional Istrian cuisine? What symbolicism does Istrian goat (*istarska koza*) have for you?

20. What comes to your mind first when you hear slogans like „Istria – a region in the Europe of the regions", and „return to Europe"?

21. What are your main preoccupations in life? What do you worry most about? What problems do you believe are affecting you most?

The "Correlation of Regional Self-identification with the Support for the Autonomy of Istria and with the Preferences Decentralization of Croatia" is the theme of the fourth pillar. The main question here is the following: How strong is the support for Istria's autonomy and decentralization of the country by people with stronger regional identification? The intention of the questions from this pillar was to find out whether there is any correlation between regional self-identification on the one hand, and the support for the autonomy of Istria and with the support for decentralization of the country on the other hand. Since Croatia is entering the EU on July 1 2013, and the regional leaders are constantly stressing the benefits Istria will have from such membership, I wanted to find out how Istrians perceive those expected benefits. This pillar includes the following questions:

22. How interested are you in national politics? What are your main preoccupations?

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23. How do you feel about Croatian state centered politics? What do you think is the effect of such politics on the region? What do you think of the relationship between the central government and Istria?

24. How do you feel about Istria's economic situation?

25. What is your opinion on giving Istria more freedom to decide on its own issues? Do you think Istria would profit from that?

26. How would you feel about Istria being given the status of an autonomous unit in Croatia?

27. What is your image of the European Union?

28. What is your opinion on the Croatia's accession to the EU? Do you believe Croatia will benefit from becoming a member?

29. How much do you think Istria will benefit from this membership?

30. If there will be a referendum on Istria's autonomy after Croatia's accession to the EU, will you go and vote?

When designing the questionnaire, I relied on both Brubaker's concept of "everyday ethnicity"[157], and on Fox and Miller-Idriss' research examining "the actual practices through which ordinary people engage and enact (and ignore and deflect) nationhood and nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives."[158] Their research agenda was applied to self-identification instead of nationhood; thus using the terms "self-identification" and "identity", instead of "nationhood" and "nation". In this study, four ways in which identity as a discursive construct is produced and reproduced in everyday life were considered:

1. 'talking the identity' – discursive construction of identity, not simply as a response to elite dictates, but resonating with contingencies of everyday life,

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[157] Rogers Brubaker et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

[158] Jon E. Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," *Ethnicities* 8, no. 4 (December 2008): 539.

2. <u>'choosing the identity'</u> – the way identity shapes, and is shaped, by choices people make,

3. <u>'performing the identity'</u> – the way people engage and interpret – and ignore and deflect – popular meaning and resonance of symbols (e.g. flags and anthems), and

4. <u>'consuming the identity'</u> – the ways in which "identity politics" is received and consumed by the people at whom it is aimed.

Questions related to these four themes were incorporated in the four main pillars of the questionnaire and they are distinguishing this research from the previous research on Istrian identity which was done before the year 2000. By analyzing people's narratives, life choices, everyday experiences and perceptions of the European Union and regional autonomy of Istria this study examines *how* relevant regional identity is in the lives of the local peoples in Istria, and also *how* does it correlate with the people's support for decentralization and autonomy for Istria.

4.3. Analysis of People's Narratives: The Research Findings

After 30 interviews, certain trends could have been established and conclusions drawn. Of course, it has to be born in mind that these findings in no way provide any basis for the generalization on all the inhabitants of Istria. Nevertheless, they do offer certain significant indications. Findings from each pillar of the questionnaire are analyzed in a separate section.

4.3.1. Personal vs. Collective Identity

When asking questions from this pillar, I wanted to find out how people think about themselves, what terms they use, and how important each of them is in their life. I expected that after all, the personal identity will "overcome" the collective one, and that people will primarily describe themselves with terms unrelated to national/regional belonging.

A large majority of respondents expressed the importance of region in their life, with 26 out of 30 (86%) emphasizing belonging to Istria. What is interesting is that many respondents would put regional belonging (43%) over the national one (10%). Zrinka, a 40-year-old female from Bale, said she feels the closest to Istria, for "one mustn't ever forget where one comes from and where s/he goes."[159] When asked about the main national and regional symbols, anthems, she explains how even though she feels respect towards Croatian anthem, the Istiran anthem is the one "her children need to know how to sing before knowing the Croatian one"[160], because she feels the Istrian anthem to be hers, and the one she feels respect and pride for.

Similar answers could be found among the younger generation as well. Even though he says he is a Croat, Marko, a 26-year-old male from Pula, emphasizes how he is "proud on my origins, a place where I was born and Istria, I am proud to be Istrian. I feel strong closeness, and I can say I relate with Istria. Even more than that feeling of closeness, I feel the need to preserve everything that is Istrian because I am well aware that Istrianness is not eternal and it lives as long as Istrians carry Istria and all that is Istrian in their heart."[161] Some

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[159] Croatian-Istrian dialect: „Najvecu bliskost naravno osjecam za mjesto gdje sam rodena – Istru. Ca nikad ne zabi, ki smo, skud smo, ca smo i kamo gremo."

[160] Croatian – Istrian dialect: „'Krasna zemljo' je himna koju moja djeca trebaju znati (i znaju) pjevati prije 'Lijepe naše', nju osjecam svojom, prema njoj osjecam ponos i poštovanje."

[161] Croatian: „Ponosan sam na svoje podrijetlo, svoju sredinu i Istru, ponosan sam što sam Istrijan. Osjecam iznimnu bliskost, mogu reci da se sa Istrom poistovjecujem. Jaci od osjecaja bliskosti je potreba da prezerviram i promoviram sve što je istarsko jer sam svjestan da Istrijanstvo nije vjecno, da Istrijanstvo živi dokle god Istrijani Istru i sve istarsko nose u srcu."

younger female respondents expressed stronger feelings towards Istria as well. Marijana, a 25-year old female from Bale, told me that "Istria is a 'heaven on Earth', a place where I was born, raised and where I live. The closest to heart are the people, Istrians, my family, friends and tradition. The reason for that is the fact that wherever you travel, you always come back home where your heart is filled, and for me that's my Istria."[162] Vesna, another respondent from Bale and a 31-year-old designer, said she considers Istria "the most beautiful place on Earth", a "home for life" and that "to be Istrian is the most important since it includes all other person's characteristics."[163]

An intriguing finding was that belonging to Istria was interpreted as national belonging by some. Mira, a 48-year old female from Buzet, said that it is "very important for me to stress my national belonging, to emphasize that I am an Istrian" because she believes that "Istrians are different from others, open, accessible and helpful."[164] She does feel that she is a citizen of the Republic Croatia as well, but when she hears the anthem of Istria "the feeling is completely different, like I am belonging to a bigger unit, that I am actually proud on all the words in that anthem since they dignifiedly describe our Istria, the place where I belong."[165] Moreover, Vladimir, a 24-year old male student from Labin, said, when comparing the feelings he has for the both anthems: "On the other hand, 'Krasna zemljo, Istro mila' is my real anthem, the one that awakens true feelings in me, and associations towards my homeland, Istria."[166] In the same tone, Lorenzo, a 24-year-old student from Buzet, said

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[162] Croatian: „Istra je 'raj na zemlji', tu sam rodena, odgojena i tu živim. Najbliže srcu su ljudi, Istrijani, naravno i roditelji, obitelj i prijatelji, tradicija. Rzlog tome je to da bilo gdje da putuješ, uvijek se vratiš kuci, tamo gdje ti je srce ispunjeno, a to je za mene moja Istra."
[163] Croatian: „Istra je najljepše mjesto na svijetu, mjesto koje lako prirasta srcu i životno utocište. Biti Istranka je najvažnije jer to opisuje sve ostale pojmove."
[164] Croatian: „Izuzetno mi je važno naglasiti nacionalnu pripadnost, naglasiti to da sam Istranka, jer smatram da su Istrijani drugaciji od drugih, otvoreni, pristupacni, spremni pomoci."
[165] Croatian: „Kada svira himna 'Krasna zemljo, Istro mila' sasvim drukciji osjecaj bude, da pripadam jednoj vecoj cjelini, da sam zapravo ponosna na rijeci u toj himni jer dostojanstveno opisuju našu Istru, mjesto kojem pripadam."
[166] Croatian: „E, 'Krasna zemljo, Istro mila' je moja prava himna, koja budi u meni prave osjecaje i asocijacije prema mojoj domovini, Istri."

that "Istria represents my homeland, while Croatia represents his administrative belonging."[167] One of the respondents who placed national belonging over the regional one was Ivan, a 55-year-old male from Porec, who said that Croatia is "my country, my home, the most beautiful and the only one."

Nevertheless, and as expected prior to starting the empirical research, people's self-identification was in majority of cases inclusive, with 57% expressing both regional and national self-identification. Josip, a 59-year-old male from Buzet, said that after giving it some thought, he has "the strongest feeling of belonging to Istria, where I was born, but to Croatia as well, a country which is my home.[168]" Another inhabitant of Buzet, Petar, a 53-year old male, said that the only reason for having slightly stronger feelings of belonging to Istria is because he "was born there and I spent my whole life there,"[169] but both Istria and Croatia are close to his heart. Vera, a 54-year-old female from Pula, said that she feels closest to Istria because "I identify myself with the people and the nature", but when she is in another country, she feels "closeness to Croatia".[170]

What was striking to find out is that there is not such a big difference between the two generations. Contrary to my expectations, large majority of both respondents from younger and older generation expressed the importance of regional identity and regional belonging. Surprisingly, a high number of 78% of respondents younger than 34 expressed how regional belonging is the primary one, while 36% of them expressed how they considered regional identification to be more important than national. On the other hand, and as expected, 93% of respondents older than 35 emphasized regional belonging as extremely important, while half

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[167] Croatian: „Kada razmišljam o tome, Istra mi predstavlja domovinu, a Hrvatska administrativnu pripadnost."
[168] Croatian: „Svakako da sa Istrom kao svojim rodnim krajem osjecam najvecu bliskost, a potom i prema Hrvatskoj kao svojoj državi."
[169] Croatian: „Osjecam najvecu bliskost za Istru, ali Hrvatska isto tako velika bliskost. ... Istru osjecam najbliže srcu zbog rodenja i provodenja cijeloga života u njoj."
[170] Croatian: „Najbliže mi je Istra. Identificiram se sa ljudima i prirodom. Kada sam u drugoj državi, osjecam bliskost sa Hrvatskom."

of them said they consider such a belonging more important than the national one. According to the hypothesis, the historical border changes in Istria did result with a higher level of connectedness with the region of those who lived through it. However, there were respondents from younger generation as well who stress the importance of historical changes for Istria. A good example is a statement from Vladimir, who said that "it is not impossible that in 10 or 20 years there will be some other country here; however Istria will always stay Istria."[171]

I also asked the locals about feeling European, since the regional leaders are often promoting Istria as a region is the "Europe of the Regions". Only 30% of respondents felt some kind of belonging to Europe, and in all cases it was not considered nearly important as other kinds of belonging (e.g. occupation, gender and religion), with almost no difference between generations. Respondents would usually tell me that Europe is too big for developing a feeling to connectedness to it. For example, Zlatko, a 23-year-old male student from Buzet, told me that he feels the least close to Europe, since "we are still not formally in it, and because I think it is too large a place to say that I am a European when there are also many divisions present inside Europe."[172] Some of them stressed the feeling of cultural belonging to the Europe. For example, Lidija, a 26-year-old female student from Pula, told me: "I probably identify myself the least with Europe, even though it is culturally very important for me, and I would never immigrate outside its borders."[173] Josip said that he also feels certain closeness to Europe "as a community to which we belong both historically and geographically"[174], but it comes after the feeling of being Istrian and Croatian.

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[171] Croatian: „Nije nemoguce da za 10-ak ili 20-ak godina bude neka druga država na ovim podrucjima, a Istra ce uvijek ostati Istra."
[172] Croatian: „Europa mi je najmanje u srcu, prvo jer još nismo niti formalno u njoj, i drugo, jer mislm da je to preveliko podrucje da bih mogao rec ja sam Europljanin kad postoje unutar toga još mnoge podjele."
[173] Croatian: „S Europom se vjerojatno najmanje identificiram, iako mi je kulturno jako važna te se, recimo, nikad ne bih iselila izvan njezinih granica."
[174] Croatian: „...a potom i prema Europi kao zajednici kojoj i povijesno i geografski pripadamo."

The findings also indicate that certain type of identity jumps to the forefront on certain occasions. For example, Ivana, a 24-year old female student from Buzet said: "When I am in Croatia, I have the greatest feeling closeness towards Istria, and when I travel abroad, then I feel closest to Croatia because then I talk most about my country and not my region. I feel very connected to Istria and I like that feeling 'when I cross the Ucka mountain' because I truly feel like home."[175] Another student, Lidija, said that it depends on the surroundings and occasion, meaning that "due to simplicity and unbiasedness, I always define myself as Croatian when I am abroad. I mention Istria very often, while on the national level, I say I am from Pula."[176] At certain times she also uses other categories, like political beliefs, occupation and gender. In relation to that, many respondents (67%) used other terms, and not national or regional belonging, when talking about how they would describe themselves. They were using terms like occupation, gender, religion and generation, including sometimes the city/town/village they come from. Nikola, a 22-year-old male student from Pula, told me that the most important term in describing himself would be occupation, since "that is something I spend most of my time on, including not only the time I spend on university, but also my free time. That is the main preoccupation and interest in my life, so that is something that definitely defines me the most in this phase of my life."[177]

We can see as regards to people's self-identification that regional belonging does play a major role in their life, resulting in almost half of the respondents (43%) placing regional belonging over the national one. Despite this, those respondents still felt Croatian and they did not stop self-identifying with the nation as well. The biggest surprise was to find out that there

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[175] Croatian: „Kad se nalazim u Hrvatskoj onda najvecu bliskost osjecam prema Istri, a kad putujem u inozemstvo onda najvecu bliskost osjecam prema Hrvatskoj jer tada najviše govorim o svojoj zemlji, a ne županiji. Za Istru osjecam veliku povezanost i volim onaj osjecaj 'kad prodem Ucku' jer se zaista osjecam kao doma."

[176] Croatian: „Možda zbog jednostavnosti i neopterecenosti, u inozemstvu se uvijek predstavljam da sam iz Hrvatske. Istru rijetko spominjem, na nacionalnoj razini kažem da sam iz Pule."

[177] Croatian: „Meni bi najvažnije bilo moje buduce zanimanje, vjerojatno zato što mi to odnosi vecinu vremena, kako fakultetskog, tako i slobodnog. To mi je glavna preokupacija i interes tako da bi to definitivno bilo nešto što me u ovoj fazi života najviše definira i time bi se najviše o meni ukratko reklo."

is not such a big difference between the two generations, which is contrary to what one might have expected, since 78% of the interviewed subjects younger than 34 expressed the principality of regional belonging. On the other hand, the feeling of being European was quite low among both generations, primarily due to the continent's size.

4.3.2. Embeddedness of Regional Identity

When looking at the ways regional identity has been constructed, there are several significant findings. 90% of all respondents are speaking local dialects and Croatian language, depending on the situation and the people they communicate with. All of these people use local dialects mostly at home, or with part of their family, since all of them have ethnically diverse families. Furthermore, despite the fact that 87% of respondents do not pay specific attention to what kind of literature they read, all 30 interviewed subjects stressed the importance of reading Istrian literature. The most often stressed reason for knowing well Istrian authors is the belief that people are able to learn many things about Istria and its people through regional literature. Luka, a 64-year-old male from Pazin, told me that "it is important to read Istrian authors due to preservation of the identity."[178] Ivan added that reading those authors "helps with the understanding of the mentality and the way of thinking of an Istrian man."[179] Similar responses could be found among younger generations as well. For example, Marko told me that the importance of reading Istrian authors lies in the fact that they help us "to understand how it was before, how people were thinking and how they were doing. It is

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[178] Croatian: „Važno je citati istarske autore radi ocuvanja identiteta."
[179] Croatian: „Vrlo je važno citati ih za shvatiti mentalitet i nacin razmišljanja istarskog covjeka."

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important to read them because it is one more way of transmitting our culture, tradition and customs."[180]

It seems that the interviewed subjects do not rely primarily on local and regional media when informing themselves daily. Majority of the interviewed subjects (60%) said they consume various media, including national local and regional, while 23% said national media was the primary source of information. When talking about people's kinship and friendship networks, large majority (70%) said they are ethnically and culturally mixed and that they do not pay special attention to someone's nationality. Still, 23% of respondents said that they spend large majority of their time with people from the place they live in, and that those people are predominantly Istrians. There was almost no difference between generations in these answers.

Not surprisingly, 23% of the interviewed subjects did not want to express their opinion of the regional party IDS-DDI and Ivan Jakovcic, or they said they are "not into politics". Out of those who responded, 61% expressed positive opinion, while the rest had extremely negative opinion. Zoran, a 58-year-old political scientist from Rovinj-Rovigno, told me he has a positive attitude towards them because they "fight for the affirmation of values like tolerance, coexistence, multiculturalism, and Ivan Jakovcic supports those values because of the fact that he grew up in an ethnically-mixed family."[181] One member of the Istrian Youth Forum, Vladimir, told me he engaged himself with the party because he believes IDS can do even better job and that he believes "IDS is the only party that still fights and cares for Istria and Istrianness and is therefore definitely the best choice we have. I believe Ivan Jakovcic is one of the best politicians in Croatia. Not in the sense of fairness, since there are

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[180] Croatian. „Smatram da je bitno citati djela istarskih književnika ukoliko želimo shvatiti kako je bilo nekada, kako se razmišljalo i radilo. Bitno je citati jer je to još jedan nacin prenošenja naše kulture, tradicije i obicaja."
[181] Croatian: „Imam pozitivan stav prema regionalnoj stranci IDS-DDI, jer se ona bori za afirmaciju vrijednosti kao što je tolerancija, suživot, multikulturalizam, a i Ivan Jakovcic podupire te vrijednosti i time što je odrastao u mješovitom braku."

very little politicians who are fair, but in the sense of being the most capable one."[182] Even though she did not want to talk a lot about it, Ivana agrees with positive comments on IDS-DDI and Jakovcic, and she told me she believes they "did a lot for Istria and they advocate for development and progress of Istria, since Istria is the most developed region after Zagreb."[183] Matko, a 33-year old IT-technician from Buzet, said he believes "it is good that a regional party is so strong on a national level, which makes it easier to achieve more for Istria, but the biggest problem is that, after so many years in power, it is almost impossible to do anything without having politics interfering in it."[184]

On the other hand, some respondents had quite negative opinion on IDS-DDI and Jakovcic. Nikola told me he never voted for them and never will because they "decorate themselves with some patriotism and they put Istria first in everything, but I am afraid that it is a bit hard to believe in that, considering their careers and history. The party is a typical regional party with a strong influence in the region, but apart from that is very weak, and I believe that the majority of votes they get come out of people's habit and tradition, as well as very weak knowledge of the political scene in the rural areas."[185] Lidija was even more sharp when describing IDS-DDI and Jakovcic, saying that she "completely despises them because in their 20-year rule they did not do anything for improving the life conditions, since Istria does not have anything except tourism, and young people especially do not want to come back here. On the other hand, they are playing the 'regionalism card', while in reality they are

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[182] Croatian: „Vjerujem da IDS može to puno bolje, zato sam se i uclanio i angažirao u stranci. Bez obzira na sve to, vjerujem da je IDS jedina stranka koja se i dalje bori i kojoj je stalo do Istre i Istrijanstva i da nam je definitivno najbolji izbor. Ivan Jakovcic je, ja smatram, jedan od najboljih politicara u Republici Hrvatskoj. Ne u smislu najpošteniji, jer iskreno, malo je takvih, nego jedan od najsposobnijih."
[183] Croatian: „Imam poztivno mišljenje o toj stranci i Jakovcicu. Oni se zalažu za razvoj i napredak Istre i ona je, naspram ostalih regija u Hrvatskoj, uz Zagreb najrazvijenija."
[184] Croatian: „Dobro je što je jedna regionalna stranka tako jaka na državnoj razini i na taj nacin ipak uspije malo više priskrbiti Istri, ali je najveci problem što je nakon toliko godina na vlasti, prakticki nemoguce išta napraviti bez da se politika uplece u to."
[185] Croatian: „Nisam im sklon, nikad nisam glasao za njih, niti necu. Oliceni su nekakvim rodoljubljem i stavljaju Istru na prvo mjesto u svemu, ali bojim se da je to malo teško za povjerovati s obzirom na njihove karijere i prošlost. Stranka kao stranka je tipicna regionalna stranka sa jakim utjecajem u regiji ali dalje od toga je razmjerno slaba a vjerujem da vecina glasova koje dobivaju su na temelju navike i tradicije, te slabog poznavanja politicke scene ruralnih krajeva."

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like HDZ. Personally, I do not even believe that the leaders of IDS truly believe in Istrianness, and they proved it with their compromising politics with two Croatian main political parties."[186] Nina, another 26-year-old from Pula, told me that she does not even want to think about them and people like them because "IDS is one poisonous party, the same as the party on power and the opposition. All of them came from the same source and they simply need to stop being an option."[187]

No woman older than 35 wanted to say anything explicitly negative about IDS-DDI and Ivan Jakovcic. Vera told me that the party did a lot for Istria, primarily by promoting co-existence. However, she told me that "now, some other skills are necessary and I believe that IDS does not have them."[188] When asked about Ivan Jakovcic, she did not want to comment, stating that she is not really interested in politics, which was an answer I often got in relation to these questions. My belief is that respondents were simply reluctant to comment politics into much detail, or to comment it at all for that matter. Also, all of those who expressed positive opinion about IDS-DDI and Jakovcic admitted that they also had negative sides, but it seems that the respondents believed the good sides excelled the bad ones. For example, Marko told me that the party has "positive and negative sides. However, the fact is that IDS and Jakovcic did a great lot for Istia and Istrianness in the past 20 years. We are not Monte Carlo, but we are ahead of every other part of Croatia in every segment of life. Istria can be happy to have such a strong regional party that takes care primarily of Istria and Istrians."[189]

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[186] Croatian: „U potpunosti ih prezirem jer u 20 godina vladavine nisu napravili ništa za poboljšanje životnih uvjeta, Istra osim turizma nema ništa, a pogotovo obrazovani ljudi se ne žele vracati. S druge strane, igraju iskljucivo na 'regionalnu kartu', dok su istinski 'HDZ u malomm'. Što je najgore, osobno ne vjerujem da vode IDS-a istinski vjeruju u 'istrijanstvo' što su dokazali svojom kompromitirajucom politikom s obje hrvatske najvece stranke."

[187] Croatian: „O njemu i slicnima ne želim mislit. IDS je jedna zatrovana stranka kao i cijela vladajuca garnitura i oporba. Sve je to izašlo iz istog legla i oni jednostavno trebaju prestat biti opcija."

[188] Croatian: „IDS je ucinio puno za Istru i Hrvatsku, promovirajuci suživot. Sada su potrebna neka druga umijeca, a mislim da ih IDS-ovci nemaju."

[189] Croatian: „IDS ima svojih prednosti i nedostataka. Cinjenica je da su za Istru i Istrijanstvo IDS i Jakovcic u zadnjih 20 godina napravili jako puno. Nismo Monte Carlo, ali u svakom segmentu smo ispred ostatka Hrvatske. Istra može biti zadovoljna da ima jaku regionalnu stranku koja vodi raluna prvenstveno o Istri i Istrijanima."

Similar responsiveness was when people were asked to express their opinion on Jakovcic's position on Istria, with almost half of the respondents (48%) expressing negative view of his position. It should be noted that the 3 male respondents who expressed positive stance on Jakovcic's position on Istria are all members of the party IDS-DDI. Even though not completely unexpected, it was surprising how opposite views of Jakovcic the interviewed subjects expressed. Mira said: "I like the fact that Jakovcic considers important to highlight how Istria is the most active region when talking about international activities; that he is ready to offer a new vision of the modern political architecture; simply the fact that we want to make some important changes that would bring only good things to us Istrians."[190] A positive view of Jakovcic is present among the younger generation as well, and Ivana told me that she has such a view because Jakovcic "contributed significantly to Istria's development, and Istria is the most developed region in Croatia, besides the city of Zagreb."[191] Marko was more detailed in his opinion, telling me he believes "Jakovcic already accomplished several of his visions; he made Istria a recognizable and branded region, he developed tourism, revived the inlands of Istria, as well as agriculture, winery and cookery. Only the most important goal is left, and that is the creation of Istria as an autonomous region that independently decides and manages its own revenues and land. … I doubt that Jakovcic has the necessary strength for the accomplishment of this goal and that will have to be assigned on the new leaders of IDS."[192]

Some respondents expressed doubts and dissatisfaction with certain aspects of Jakovcic's vision of Istria. Matko told me "Jakovcic's vision and plans are fine, but the

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[190] Croatian: „Svida mi se što Jaovcic smatra bitnim isticati kako je Istarska županija najaktivnija regija što se tice medunarodnih aktivnosti, šro se sprema ponuditi novu viziju moderne politicke arhitekture, jednostavno to što želimo napraviti neke važne promjene koje bi nama Istrijanima donijele samo dobro."

[191] Croatian: „Imam pozitivno mišljenje jer je on dosta pridonio njenom razvitku i Istra je, naspram ostalih regija u Hrvatskoj, uz Zagreb najrazvijenija."

[192] Croatian: „"Jakovcic je ostvario nekoliko svojih vizija, stvorio je prepoznatljivu i brendiranu regiju, razvio je turizam, oživio je središnju Istru, razvio je poljoprivredu, vinarstvo, kulinarstvo. Ostaje mu onaj najvažniji cilj, a to je stvaranje autonomne regije Istre koja samostalno upravlja svojim prihodima, zemljom... Za ostvarenje tog cilja sumnjam da on ima snage i to ce biti na sljedecoj garnituri IDSovaca koji zauzmu njegovo mjesto."

problem is with their realization."[193] Jelena, a 55-year-old teacher from Pula, told me that even though she is apolitical, she believes it is good to have a regional party that would take care of the interests of Istria and that she "supports everything that is good for all of us in Istria, but I do not support the isolation and separation."[194] On the other hand, some of them were extremely critical. Lidija was very harsh when describing Jakovcic's vision of Istria, the same as when describing the regional party IDS-DDI. She told me that his vision of Istria is elite tourism, "so one can expect that in 20 years all of us will be waiters and golf ball collectors, while he drinks costly wine in his private village. Everything else is his longtime demagogy. Science, culture, industry… none of that is present in Istria, and it will not be except on a closed local and unimportant level."[195]

Since the percentage of those who emphasized the importance of regional belonging (86%) is much higher than the percentage of those supporting IDS-DDI and Jakovcic (61%), it can be concluded that regional identity is not simply constructed as a response to the elite dictates, but is significantly embedded in family as well, primarily through the usage of the Istrian dialects, and also through knowledge of works from Istrian authors. On the other hand, people's friendship networks have little connection with regional self-identification, since majority of interviewed subjects stressed how they are surrounded with people of various ethnic backgrounds and political beliefs.

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[193] Croatian: „Vizija i planovi su u redu, ali problem je kod realizacije istih."
[194] Croatian: „Sve što je dobro za sve nas u Istri podržavam, ali ne podržavam izdvajanje i odvajanje."
[195] Croatian: „Njegova vizija Istre je elitni turizam, pa je za ocekivati da cemo za 20 godina svi biti konobari i skupljaci golf loptica, dok on bude ispijao skupocjeno vino u svojem privatnom selu. Sve ostalo je njegova dugogodišnja demagogija. Znanost, kultura, industrija. Toga u Istri nema i nece postojati osim na zatvorenoj lokalnoj i nebitnoj razini."

4.3.3. Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive and Attitudinal Aspects of One's Self-Identification

When asked how proud of being Istrian/Croat/European they are, 20% of those interviewed said they are not proud at all. For them, their ethnicity or place of origin was not something related to the feeling of being proud. For example, Vera told me there is "no place for feeling pride at all. I believe that a person can be proud on something he or she contributed to, but not to the belonging he gets by birth."[196] Among the others, 57% were more proud of being Istrian, while 43% were very proud of being Croatian. Here, one can see that there are fewer respondents who placed Istria above Croatia, as opposed to 86% of them who emphasized the importance of feeling and being Istrian. And so, Dino, a 32-year-old from Vodnjan, said he "doesn't feel proud on being Istrian nor Croat, but I feel like an inhabitant of Planet Earth"[197] even though he said before that Istria feels closest to his heart.

Robert, a 50-year-old from Buzet, told me he feels the greatest closeness to Istria, but then he said: "I am very proud of being Croat above all. Istria is in Croatia, so I am a Croat."[198] Ana, a 53-year-old teacher from Porec, shares the sense of pride for being Croat, and she told me she has the strongest feeling of belonging to the city she comes from, but she is most proud to be Croatian. She said: "I feel more like a Croatian. Maybe I don't feel like Istrian because I never spoke the dialect and because I am brought up to love and respect all people of good will no matter their national and religious belonging, or their skin color."[199]

Among those interviewed subjects who expressed the feeling of pride for being Istrian, the younger male respondents were especially expressive. Marko said he is "proud to

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[196] Croatian: „Uopce nema mjesta ponosu. Smatram da covjek može biti ponosan na nešto cemu je on doprinio a ne na pripadnost koju dobiva rodenjem."

[197] Croatian: „Nisam ni Hrvat, ni Istrijan ni Europljanin. Osjecam se kao stanovnik planete Zemlje."

[198] Croatian: „Jako sam ponosan najviše na to što sam Hrvat. Istra je u Hrvatskoj, dakle Hrvat sam."

[199] Croatian: „Više sam Hrvatica. Možda se ne osjecam Istrijanskom jer nikada nisam govorila cakavicu i zato što sam odgajana da volim i poštujem sve ljude dobre volje, bez obzira na nacionalnu pripadnost, vjersku pripadnost, te boju kože."

be Istrian, proud on what Istria has achieved and the direction in which it is going. I put regional belonging first, because I believe that a man has to love its home above all, then his land, etc."[200] Vladimir has similar view, stating that he is "a proud Istrian. What more should I say? I feel the least like 'a proud Croat', especially during football games and when things like Croatianness, the Ustasha-movement and Thompson are glorified, and hatred towards Serbs particularly bothers me, especially considering we were brothers until 1991."[201]

Considering these results, it was surprising to find out that, when asked whether they feel more Istrian or Croatian, 40% of the interviewed subjects said they felt more like Istrians, while 33% said they are feeling both Istrian and Croatian. 6 out of 9 females older than 35 said they are more Istrian than Croatian (see Appendix 5). Nevertheless, taking into account these results, it seems that, as expected, regional identity, where it exists, is in majority of cases in no way exclusive of national one. One can feel stronger belonging to the region, but at the same time be proud of being Croat as well, or being both Croat and Istrian.

Again, the number of those mentioning Europe was really small, with only five respondents (17%) who mentioned they are proud of being European. Nevertheless, none of them would place the feeling of being European as stronger than the other two. It is interesting to point out that even though there were three women older than 35 who expressed that they do feel they are European in the first set of questions, none of them expressed the feeling of being proud to be European. The most often mentioned reason is Europe being too broad a concept and too big a place, so therefore they cannot feel the same way of belonging as is the case with Istria and/or Croatia.

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[200] Croatian: „Ponosan sam na to što sam Istrijan, ponosan sam na to što je Istra napravila i u kojem smjeru ide. Regionalnu pripadnost stavljam na prvo mjesto jer držim da covjek najprije treba voliti svoj dom, pa svoj kraj, itd.“
[201] Croatian: „Ponosni Istrijan! Šta je više potrebno reci? Najmanje sam 'ponosni Hrvat', pogotovo kada se igraju nogometne utakmice i kada se velica hrvatstvo, ustašizam, Thompson i slicne stvari, i posebno mi smeta mržnja prema Srbima, buduci da smo do '91. bili braca.“

Surprisingly, a large majority of respondents (93%) said they are not willing to leave Istria and go to another country. These respondents were satisfied with what the region offered them, and only 36% expressing they would leave only in case of being forced to due to economic or existential reasons. Robert told me "I would never leave because I have everything I need in Istria. I like everything here, climate, the way of living, and the opportunities."[202] Mira said she likes to travel and meet new cultures, but "my home is Istria. Even if I went to live somewhere else, I think something would always draw me back to Istria."[203] An intriguing answer came from Marko who told me he already had "several opportunities to go abroad, but I never needed to think for long, and I always declined. I could possibly go for studies or temporary work abroad, maximum for 2 years. I have never thought about going away to Croatia, because I think it would be a step back for me.[204]" On the other hand, there were two female respondents younger than 34 (7%) who said they want to go abroad to search for a better life. One of them, Lidija, answered with a decisive yes, stating that she considers "the life in Istria doesn't satisfy my needs. It is a periphery where a person's potential cannot be completely actualized, it is outside of all the main cultural and social happenings."[205]

Every interviewed subject had at least two words of praise for why living in Istria is great and makes them proud. Absolute majority of respondents, (87%) emphasized the beauty of the nature as one of the best things about living in Istria, while the character and mentality of the people were on second place (47%). Marijana told me she likes the fact "Istria is a peaceful region, with good and civilized people, culture, beautiful nature, and sea. I am proud

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[202] Croatian: „Ne bih otišao jer imam sve što mi treba u Istri. Svida mi se sve, podneblje, nacin života, mogucnosti.“

[203] „Croatian: „Volim putovati, obilaziti druge zemlje, upoznavati nove kulture, ali moj dom je Istra. I da odem živjeti drugdje, mislim da bi me nešto uvijek vuklo natrag u Istru.“

[204] Croatian: „U nekoliko navrata mi se vec ukazala prilika da odem u inozemstvo. Nikada nisam dugo razmišljao, uvijek sam odbio. Eventualno bih mogao otici na studij ili kraci rad u inozemstvo na maksimalno dvije godine. O odlasku u Hrvatsku nisam nikad razmišljao. Mislim da bi to bio korak u nazad.“

[205] Croatian: „Smatram da život u Istri ne zadovoljava moje potrebe. To je periferija na kojoj se covjekov potencijal ne može u potpunosti ostvariti, izvan je svih glavnih kulturnih i društvenih zbivanja.“

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of Istria because it can satisfy everyone who visits her. There is everything a man can wish for here. I like absolutely everything in Istria, so I cannot point out to any specific thing."[206] Marko said: "Istria is a small region where you can get to know every corner if you make an effort. People are nice, courteous, and always ready to help. I adore Istrian beauties, sea, mountains, and valleys. … I travelled half of the world, and I still think home is the most beautiful place of all. I tasted various world cuisines, and I still think our Istrian cuisine is the best and the tastiest one. I am proud of our history and anti-fascism."[207] Vladimir told me he likes the people in Istria, because "you can see much higher level of understanding and culture in comparison to some other parts of Croatia. For example, we Istrians ostentimes speak the dialect in Istria, but when we are in Rijeka, Zagreb or Split, at the university or anywhere else where other people would not understand us, we speak standard Croatian. Is it the same with Dalmatians? Absolutely not! Besides the people, I like the nature; we have absolutely everything one can wish for."[208]

Those who expressed some dissatisfaction, mentioned various things, with three mentioned most often being: constant emphasis and desire for separation (4 out of 30 respondents), political leaders who neglect interests of Istria (3 out of 30 respondents), and the local people's belief in specificities of the region and its people (2 out of 30 respondents). For example, Lidija told me she likes the natural beauty of Istria and the lack of radical nationalism, but "I don't like petty-bourgeois mentality and the definition of life 'over the

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[206] Croatian: „Svida mi se to što je Istra mirna regija, dobri civilizirani ljudi, kultura, predivna priroda, more... Ponosna sam na Istru jer može zadovoljiti svakog covjeka koji ju posjeti. Ima sve što covjek može poželjeti! Meni se u Istri svida sve pa je teško odvojiti jednu stvar."

[207] Croatian: „Istra je mala regija u kojoj ako se potrudite, možete upoznati svaki kutak. Ljudi su dragi, uljudni, uvijek spremni da pomognu. Obožavam istarske ljepote, more, brda, doline. ... Prošao sam pola svijeta i opet mi je najljepše doma. Kušao sam razne svjetske kuhinje i opet mi je najbolja naša istarska kuhinja. Ponosan sam na našu prošlost i antifašizam."

[208] Croatian: „Vezano za život u Istri, svidaju mi se ljudi, Istrijani. Ipak se primijeti puno vece razumijevanje i kultura i obzir u odnosu na neke druge dijelove Hrvatske. Primjerice, mi Istrijani u Istri pricamo po domace, ali kada smo u Rijeci, Zagrebu, Splitu, na fakultetima ili bilo gdje gdje nas drugi ljudi nebi razumijeli, pricamo cisto hrvatski. Da li je ista stvar sa Dalmatincima? Apsolutno ne! Osim ljudi, svida mi se priroda, imamo brda, planine, doline, cisto more, šume... apsolutno sve što se može poželjeti!"

Ucka mountain', and also the self-assessing of the Istria as 'the land of the good people' and that Istria is special in comparison to the whole world, when logical and cosmopolitan view of the world shows how all the 'specificities' of Istria can be found in other cultures as well."[209] Nikolina, a 22-year-old student from Buzet, told me she is "proud on Istria's cultural, natural and historical landmarks. Istria really has things to laud itself. On the other hand, I do not like people who 'lead' Istria and who emphasize too much the idea of its separation from the rest of the country."[210] Clearly, despite the negative sides do exist, the respondents see more positive sides to living in Istria, which is in accordance to them not having strong desire to leave the region.

What was very surprising is that there was no agreement as to what the characteristics of 'typical Istrians' are. Despite the fact that regional political leader are trying to promote certain picture of 'typical Istrians' (e.g. being tolerant, multiethnic and pro-European), it seems that local people are not buying into it. There were only two characteristics that were repeated by several people, namely Istrians strongly connected to their origins and devoted to keeping their culture and dialect alive (33%), and Istrians as extremely hard-working people (27%). Zoran described a typical Istrian as "a person very tied to the preservation of his or her tradition, culture, dialect, and he or she is very cautious towards anything coming from outside of Istria."[211] Vera sees typical Istrians as "hard-

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[209] Croatian: „Smatram da je Istra geografski i prirodno lijepa, krajolik, pejsaž, more, mala sela itd. Svida mi se šti nema radikalnog nacionalizma kao drugdje. Medutim, ne svida mi se malogradanski mentalitet i definiranje života 'priku Ucke' te samoprocjenjivanje vlastitog istarskog identiteta kao 'zemlje dobrih ljudi' i kao da je Istra posebna u ostatku na cijeli svijet, kad logican i kozmopolitski pogled na svijet pokazuje da se sve 'specificnosti' Istre mogu ipak pronaci u drugim kulturama."
[210] Croatian: „Ponosna sam prije svega na njezine kulturne, prirodne i povijesne znamenitosti. Istra se doista ima cime pohvaliti. S druge strane, ne svidaju mi se ljudi koji 'vode' Istru i koji previše naglašavaju ideju o njezinom odvajanju od ostatka države."
[211] Croatian: „Tipican Istrijan je jako vezan za ocuvanje svoje tradicije, kulturu, svoj dijalekt i oprezan je prema svemu što dolazi izvan Istre."

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working, calm, tolerant, hospitable people, who sometimes lack self-confidence in comparison to other people, maybe because they always feel they are 'under someone'."[212]

Vladimir has a very specific view of a typical Istrian. He told me he would describe them above all as "people who talk and understand the Istrian talk, no matter which dialect it is. Besides that, when you ask a true Istrian where they are from, they will always tell you: 'From Istria'. Furthermore, true Istrians know how to play the typical Istrian card games; they love domestic products, etc. And finally, a true Istrian will always say: 'Istrians are the best people', which is true."[213] Ivana also has a specific view, attributing many adjectives to a typical Istrian, and so she says "a typical Istrian is happy, sociable, hard-working, fair, sensitive to social issues, talks many languages, quite organized, persistent, devoted, innovative, not to loud, mildly humoristic, loves his/her city and region, connected to family and friends, likes to dance, sing, taste good wine, eat good food, to use dialect speech, but has no problem transferring to using the standard language. People from Istria are considered different by the rest of Croatia and wherever I come people tell me how we really are different, so if everyone says so and feels it, we must be different."[214]

A more negative view of typical Istrians came from Robert who said that in her opinion, they are "those who advocate the separation from the rest of Croatia, worship mostly

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[212] Croatian: „Tipican Istrijan je vrijedan, miran, tolerantan, gostoljubiv, ponekad mu nedostaje samopouzdanja u odnosu na druge ljude, možda jer se osjecaju uvijek 'pod nekim'."

[213] Croatian: „Tipicnog Istrijana/Istrijanku bih opisao tako da prije svega pricaju i razumiju Istarski govor, bez obzira na dijalekte. Osim toga, kada se pravog Istrijana/Istrijanku pita od kuda su, odgovor je: 'Od Istre'. Dalje, pravi Istrijani znaju igrati karte (briškulu, trešete), vole domace proizvode, itd. I na kraju, pravi Istrijan/Istrijanka ce uvijek reci: 'Istrijani su najbolji ljudi', što je istina."

[214] Croatian: „Tipican Istrijan je veseo, društven, radišan, korektan, osjetljiv na društvene probleme, prica više jezika, prilicno organiziran, uporan, predan, inovativan, ne pretjerano glasan, umjereno humoristican, voli svoj grad i regiju, povezan za svoju obitelj i prijatelje, voli plesati, pjevati (posebno uz harmoniku), voli kušati dobro vino, jesti maneštru, govori dijalektom, ali se bez problema prebaci na standardni jezik, doduše ostaju mu istarski naglasci u rijecima. Ljude iz Istre ostatak Hrvatske smatra drugacijim i gdje god došla ljudi mi govore kako zaista jesmo drugaciji, pa valjda ako svi to govore i osjecaju, onda i jesmo drugaciji, no ja se osobno ne osjecam nešto posebno razlicita od drugih."

only Istrian traditions and consider Istria to be far more important than Croatia."[215] Lidija was also critical, stating that "a typical Istrian has fear from the 'Other' which always has a pejorative meaning, while at the same time they project a picture of themselves as multicultural and open society. Yes, but only for those culture that are traditional in Istrian, like Slavic and Italian. The rest are always 'the Others'."[216]

These findings are quite opposite from what Jakovcic keeps emphasizing as a 'typical Istrian'. However, considering that many people do not have such a high opinion of Jakovcic, it seems that their construction of Istrian identity is not that responsive to regional political elites. It seems that this picture of Istrian as an extremely hard-working person is very popular, since 63% of respondents emphasized it as a main reason for Istria's great success in tourism. Moreover, Jakovcic's repeating of slogans like "Istria – a region in the Europe of the regions" and "return to Europe" have little resonance with the locals, since half of them see them as politicization of Istria and Istrian identity used in political campaigns or relate absolutely no feelings and no meaning to them.

When exploring the resonance of regional symbols (flag, anthem and Istrian goat), I found out that 43% of respondents said they have no meaning for them, and majority of them said they do not posses nor wish to possess the Istrian flag. Out of those interviewed, the majority (54%) were women younger than 34. Lidija told me that she associates the flag "exclusively to politics, especially IDS and Jakovcic, and idiocy of the idea of Istria as an autonomous unit."[217] 37% of all interviewed subjects said hearing the Istrian anthem or seeing the flag made them feel regional belonging. Zlatko told me that because "the goat and the flag

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[215] Croatian: „Tipicni Istrijani po mom mišljenju se zalažu za njezino odcijepljenje od ostatka Hrvatske, štuju uglavnom samo Istarske narodne obicaje te im je pojam Istra daleko vacniji od pojma Hrvatska."
[216] Croatian: „Tipicni Istrijan ima strah od Drugih koji uvijek ima pejorativno znacenje, dok s druge strane projiciraju sliku o sebi kao multikulturalnom i otvorenom društvu. Da, ali samo za one kulture koje su tradicionalne u Istri, kao što su slavenska i talijanska. Ostali su uvijek drugi."
[217] Croatian: „Zastavu vežem iskljucivo za politiku, pogotovo za IDS i Jakovcica, te idijotizam Istre kao autonomne jedinice."

are symbols of Istria, they awake the feeling of belonging in me."[218] Mira told me that "the Istrian goat is the true symbol of Istria and when I see it on the flag, I immediately remember my Istria."[219] Zoran told me that the Istrian goat has been "the main source of food for the inhabitants of the peninsula and she could live in the karst regions… She presents toughness and persistence of the Istrian man. The coat of arms and the flag present today's geographically limited Istria in Croatia, which is eager of development and prosperity."[220]

The importance of regional self-identification in everyday life was also assessed by asking the interviewed subjects questions on their main preoccupations and worried in life, and the problems which affect them most. As expected, nothing that can be related to region, autonomy or regional identity was on their list. The most often mentioned preoccupations were family (63%), economic crisis and unemployment (53%), the possibility of self-realization (30%) and what the future will bring (30%). One intriguing thing to point out is that economic crisis and unemployment were by far bigger problem for women, with 75% of women stressing it as one of their main preoccupations, as opposed to only 25% of men who expressed their fear about possible unemployment. This is in line with the general issue of the number of unemployed women in Croatia.[221]

To sum up, answers from this pillar showed that regional self-identification, even though it exists, is not so important in the everyday life of people, where they mostly preoccupy themselves with family and the economic situation. Again, we can see the inclusiveness of regional self-identification, and also the failure of the regional political leaders to sell the picture of a 'typical Istrian', because it seems that local people are not

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[218] Croatian: „Koza i zastava su simbol Istre i time mi bude osjecaj pripadnosti.""

[219] Croatian: „Istarska koza je pravi simbol Istre, kad nju vidim na grbu, odmah se shetim moje Istre."

[220] Croatian: „Istarska koza je bila glavni izvor hrane stanovništva poluotoka i mogla je živjeti i u krškim krajevima... Ona predstavlja žilavost i upornost istarskog covjeka. Grb i zastava predstavljaju današnju geografsku Istru u Hrvatskoj, željnu razvoja i prosperiteta."

[221] Accroding to statistics, the total registered unemployment rate in January 2013 was 21.9%, and for women it was 24.2%. [*Persons in Paid Employment, by Activites*, First Release (Zagreb: Croatian Bureau of Statistics, February 28, 2013), http://www.dzs.hr/Hrv_Eng/publication/2013/09-02-01_01_2013.htm.]

buying into it. We can also see regarding the popular meaning and resonance of regional symbols, that people mostly ignore them, even though for some of them they do awake the sense of regional belonging.

4.3.4. Correlation of Regional Self-Identification with the Support for the Autonomy of Istria and with the Support for Decentralization of Croatia

How is regional self-identification correlated with the support for the autonomy of Istria and with the support for decentralization of the country? Even though it might have been expected, it was still disappointing to see the reluctance of people to answer to these questions. It seems that people in general in Croatia do not like to express their political opinions if they cannot hide behind complete anonymity. Nevertheless, there were some interesting findings here as well. In line with general trend in Croatia, minority of interviewed subjects (40%) expressed interest in politics, and half of those were men younger than 34. Economic politics and politics that have influence directly to people's life were mostly mentioned, with 83% of respondents emphasizing them as their main preoccupations.

As expected, most respondents (70%) believe Istria should get more freedom because it would profit significantly from being able to decide internally about its own problems. The answers were equally distributed throughout generations and gender. Dino told me he believes "more freedom in deciding should be given to all the regions, because everyone knows what is not good in their 'yard'."[222] Ana told me that even though she cannot think about regional autonomy, gaining more freedom to make decisions would "not only be a great success for Istria, but the whole Croatia as well."[223] Some of the respondents expressed

[222] Croatian: „Mislim da bi svim regijama trebalo dati više slobode u odlučivanju jer svatko zna što nije dobro u njegovom 'dvorištu'."
[223] Croatian: „Uspjeh za Istru bio bi i uspjeh za cijelu Hrvatsku."

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doubts about the success of the autonomy. Matko doubts whether Istria would truly profit from gaining autonomy. He told me he would feel both "pride and fear if Istria got the status of an autonomous unit in Croatia. Pride, because then it would show that it is really worthy, and fear because I doubt that it could deal with its problems alone."[224] Similar thoughts are shared by Vera, who told me she believes that "it is good to have more independence when making decision, because there are specificities that are more easily recognized within the region itself. Whether Istria would profit from it or not depends on the people who are in power, but I am not overly optimistic."[225]

The reason for such an opinion lies in the perception of the Croatian state centered politics. Despite respondents being reluctant to express in depth their view of such a politics, 57% of them said that the main problem is that such a politics is ignoring Istria and its specific problems and needs, while 37% stated that the main problem is in lack of financial investments in the region which leads to slower regional development than Istria is capable of. Zoran told me that "the state centered politics, especially during the hard economic crisis, increases various imposts and taxes on the newly made values, and that influences the decrease of opportunities for investments in Istria. This definitely slows down further economic development of Istria."[226] Luka stated that "the state centered politics is a failed policy, because the government has never understood the needs and problems of Istria."[227] Matko agrees with undesirability of the state centered politics, stating that it is "in genral a bad thing for any state"; however he believes that in Croatia "things cannot be different

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[224] Croatian: „Osjecao bih ponos i strah kad bi Istra dobila status autonomne jedinice u Hrvatskoj. Ponos, jer bi time dokazala da zaista vrijedi, a strah jer sumnjam, i to jako, da bi sama mogla rješavati sve probleme."
[225] Croatian: „Više samostalnosti je dobro jer postoje specifcnosti koje se lakše prepoznaju unutar same regije. Da li ce Istra profitirati ovisi o ljudima koji je vode, ali nisam jako optimisticna."
[226] Croatian: „Centristicka državna politika, pogotovo za vrijeme teške ekonomske krize, povecava razne vrste nameta, poreza na novoostvarene vrijednosti i time se smanjuje mogucnost za daljnja ulaganja u Istri. To svakako usporava daljnji ekonomski razvoj regije."
[227] Croatian: „Centrizam je promašena politika, jer vlast nije nikada shvatila potrebe i probleme Istre."

because there is no mechanism for the control of 'the local sheriffs', in other words the regional and local power-holders who love to do things in their own way."[228]

On the other hand, some respondents saw the "story of the state centered politics" as a cover up for gaining support for isolating the region further. Robert said that he believes "Istria unnecessarily wants to separate from the country and therefore promotes and imposes certain ideas."[229] He goes on to say that there is no need to give more freedom to Istria and that it would "suck" if it gains the status of an autonomous unit, "it is completely unnecessary, we are a part of Croatia and this is the law."[230] Nikola is somewhat in agreement with him, but he framed the problem a bit different, stating that he does not agree Croatia is a centralized country "because these are pretenses. The Constitution guarantees the right to regional and local self-government and administration, and therefore any idea of centralized policy is untrue. The only thing with which I could agree is that the money is unevenly distributed, and because of that the region cannot prosper as much as it could.[231]"

Younger generation was more prone to stressing the problem of regional development with the national politics of centralization. Vladimir said that "the desire of us Istrians is that the country gets decentralized, like all the other normal European countries. Obviously, it doesn't really fit into Croatian policy because it would lose a lot of money from Istria and similar rich countries, which means the country would have to do an extra job in order to make up for such a loss. … The effect of such a policy on all the regions in Croatia, including Istria, is that those regions develop much slower and worse, and there is not enough

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[228] Croatian: „Centrizam je opcenito loša stvar za bilo koju državu. Nažalost, smatram da se kod nas ne može baš drukcije jer ne postoje mehanizmi za kontrolu 'lokalnih šerifa,' odnosno regionalnih i lokalnih vlastodržaca koji 'vole' stvari raditi na svoj nacin."

[229] Croatian: „Smatram da se Istra nepotrebno želi odvojiti te tako uzdiže i namece neke svoje svoje ideje."

[230] Croatian: „Bezveze, nepotrebno je to, dio smo Hrvatske i to je zakon."

[231] Croatian: „Ne slažem se da je Hrvatska centralizirana zemlja jer su to nebuloze. U Ustavu piše da je zajamceno pravo na regionalnu i lokalnu upravu i samoupravu, tako da svaka ideja o centristickoj politici je netocna. Jedino bih se mogao složiti da se novac raspodijeljuje neravnomjerno, te Istra radi toga ne može napredovati koliko bi mogla."

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money for building the main necessities"[232] Marko believes "the relationship of the government towards Istria has always been like a step-mother's towards her child. Zagreb simply does not understand Istria, and that is visible from the actions of the present government. Centralized system is the greatest weight for the development of Istria today."[233] However, not everyone would agree completely with such an opinion. Lidija agrees that the centralized politics is totally wrong; nevertheless she told me that she believes "every region is affected by that, so I do not see why Istria should need a special treatment. I think that the relationship between the government and those on power in Istria is actually very good for the Istrian politicians."[234]

Despite such a high percentage of support for decentralization, and as expected, only 43% of interviewed subjects expressed they would feel happy and proud if Istria gained autonomy. Vladimir told me he sees Istria "as an autonomous region because every normal country in Europe has autonomous regions and that is functioning. Only Croatia is against it. Of course, the reason is that Croatia could not suck out that much money out of Istria in that case. But, is it fair that Istria is left with only 8% of the total profit it gains from tourism, industry and similar things, while 92% goes to Zagreb? Of course it's not."[235] Ivana would agree with this opinion, stating that she believes "centralized policy is not good, because every region knows best how to pursue its policies, and therefore decentralization would function the best in every region, including Istria. If Istria gained the status of an autonomous

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[232] Croatian: „Želja nas Istrijana je da se država decentralizira, kao i sve normalne Europske države. Ocito to Hrvatskoj ne odgovara jer bi izgubila dosta novaca od Istre i slicnih bogatih županija te bi se trebali dodatno potruditi kako nabaviti te novce u državnu blagajnu. ... Efekt takve politike na sve regije u Hrvatskoj, medu njima i Istru je taj da se takve regije puno sporije i lošije razvijaju, nema se dovoljno novaca za izgradnju osnovnih životnih gradevina."

[233] Croatian: „Odnosi vlasti prema Istri je oduvijek bio macehinski. Zagreb Istru jednostavno ne razumije što je vidljivo i iz poteza današnje Vlade. Centralizirani sustav je danas najveci uteg razvoja Istre."

[234] Croatian: „Smatram da je centristicka državna politika pogrešna ... Sve su regije time pogodene, pa ne vidim zašto bi Istra trebala imati poseban tretman. Smatram da je odnos vlasti i istarske vlasti zapravo vrlo dobar, za njih."

[235] Croatian. „Istru vidim kao autonomnu regiju. Zašto? Pa svaka normalna zemlja u Europi ima autonomne regije i to funkcionira. Jedino se Hrvatska protivi tome. Naravno, razlog je taj šta bi Hrvatska u tom slucaju izvlacila manje novaca iz Istre. Ali, da li je pošteno da Istri godišnje ostaje samo 8% iz ukupnih prihoda od turizma, industrije i slicno, a 92% ide u Zagrev? Normalno da nije."

unit, we would have good financial status, and with that comes the possibility to develop various and necessary projects for the advancement of Istria."[236] On the other hand, some respondents were more for financial autonomy. For example, Dino said he "would not like Istria to be an autonomous unit, but I want financial autonomy. Istria would profit from that because it is the second region in Croatia according to the level of GDP."[237] Mira went eveb farther than all the rest, by saying "It is very important for me that I am an Istrian, and that is something I like to emphasize and I say often that it would be good that we separate from Croatia and establish a state."[238]

Moreover, 37% of those interviewed explicitly stated they would not support regional autonomy (see Appendix 6). The questions on autonomy and possible referendum were answered briefly and with quite a big fear among majority of respondents. 20% of the interviewed subjects said they do not know yet whether they would go and vote on a referendum on Istrian autonomy, with 67% of them being women above 35. At the same time, none of those women explicitly stated to be against Istria's autonomy. Surprisingly, one even stated she supports the idea of Istria as an independent country. In addition, out of those who explicitly voted for autonomy, all of them were male respondents, and almost all of them were those younger than 34 (4 out of 5 respondents). This mismatch of results related to regional self-identification and strong preferences for entering the EU is expected. Due to the culturally and ethnically diverse character of the region, it could have been expected that regional self-identification does not necessarily correlate with stronger preferences for entering the EU and for decentralization of Croatia.

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[236] Croatian: „Smatram da centralizam nije dobar jer svaka regija zna najbolje voditi vlastitu politiku, stoga bi decentralizacija najbolje funkcionirala u svakoj regiji, pa tako i Istri. Kad bi Istra dobila status autonomne jedinice u Hrvatskoj, imali bi dobro financijsko stanje, a s time bi se dalje razvijali razliciti potrebni projekti i napredovanje Istre."
[237] Croatian: „Ne bi mi bilo drago da smo autonomna jedinica, vec želim financijsku autonomiju. Istra bi sigurno profitirala jer je druga regija u Hrvatskoj po visini BDP-a."
[238] Croatian: „Meni je jako važno da sam Istrijanka, to je ono što volim isticati i cesto znam reci da bi bilo dobro da se odvojimo i budemo država."

Intriguingly, even though the interviewed subjects do not buy that much into Jakovcic's ideas on Istrian identity, it seems that they are more prone to believe in his promises on Istria benefitting from Croatia's acceptance to the European Union. Since Croatia is entering the EU on July 1 2013, the regional leaders are more and more prone to stressing the benefits Istria will have from such membership. In line with that, 57% of respondents expressed their belief that Istria will benefit from being in the EU.

To sum up, regional self-identification is to some extent correlated with the support for decentralization of the country, since large majority of respondents (70%) believes Istria should get more freedom because it would profit significantly from being able to decide internally about its own problems. Nevertheless, it is not correlated with the support for the autonomy of Istria. One surprising finding was that one interviewed subject expressed the support for Istria becoming an independent country.

4.3.5. Interpretation of the Research Findings

The main purpose of the empirical research in Istria was to examine whether local people in Istria developed regional identity feelings in the way political elites are trying to promote, to what extent is that regional identification meaningful in everyday life and how does it correlate with the support of the locals for regional autonomy. The results of the research show that even though regional belonging and regional self-identification are important, they are rarely a salient frame for people's routine talk and interaction. People use many other terms, like occupation and gender, when thinking about themselves and when not explicitly asked about the feeling of belonging and pride for their region and/or nation. This shows the predominance of personal over collective identity among the interviewed subject. Also, the environment people find themselves into significantly influences on how they will

describe themselves, and so when travelling abroad some of them will primarily describe themselves as Croats, even though they would not use this term otherwise. Therefore, for a large majority of interviewed subjects regional self-identification does not imply the lack of other types of identifications, as Keating notes.[239] Moreover, people's understanding of themselves and their predicaments are most of the time not framed by regional self-identification.

Using qualitative interviewing techniques enabled me to capture how ordinary people's representation of regional identity and belonging do not simply reflect what is promoted in the regional leader's rhetoric, but are more dependent on the contingencies of everyday life. This explains the differing views of 'typical Istrian' and '*Istrianness*' among the interviewed subjects, and their concurrence with the view of 'typical Istrian' and '*Istrianness*' Jakovcic and his party IDS-DDI persistently promote. Only two characteristics were repeated by several people, namely Istrians being strongly connected to their origins and devoted to keeping their culture and dialect alive, and Istrians as extremely hard-working people. Therefore, it can be implied that things like people's interpretation of history, the stance towards the European Union, and the position on the state-centered politics influence on how ordinary Istrians construct the understanding of '*Istriannes*' and their own identity as Istrians.

Regional identity is also shaped by the choices people make, which again influence on the way that identity is shaped. The interview results showed how people do not make many choices that would additionally strengthen their regional identity. For example, the interviewed subjects do not predominantly consume regional and local media, nor do they read regional web-pages. Furthermore, people's friendship networks and interactions seem

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[239] People have multiple identities, meaning regional identification is not exclusive of other ones. [Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*, 88.]

not to be framed by their regional self-identification, and the interviewed subjects did not emphasize the importance of spending time with people of specific regional/national/political orientation. However, the fact that most of them come from mixed families, this might be a factor that influences them emphasizing more regional than national self-identification most of the time. On the other hand, all the interviewed subjects stressed the importance of reading the regional literature since it provides means of learning many things about Istria, its people and their mentality.

In close relation to that are the ways in which "identity politics" is received and consumed by the ordinary people. The same as nationalism, regional identity is an act of production with regions and their agents coordinating the process to a lesser or bigger degree. Besides the consumption of regional media, here one can emphasize tourism and Istrian cuisine. Regional cuisine is often stressed by regional leaders as something specific for Istria, and it seems that people are buying into that, since all of the respondents were full of words of praise for that cuisine, expressing its particularity and sometimes even comparing it to the "particularity of Istrians as people." All of the interviewed subjects told me they consume Istrian cuisine on a daily basis. Moreover, that cuisine was displayed to tourists as another symbol of Istria. Tourism has also been stressed by many people as the main way in which Istria can show to tourists its "own regional" artifacts and promote its beauties. It can therefore be implied that the interviewed subjects were quite responsive to what regional elites have been selling as identity of the region.[240]

The lives of ordinary people are also intersected with various regional symbols, like flags, anthems and landmarks. It seems that most of those interviewed do not attach special meanings to those symbols. However, people interpret meanings and valences of symbols

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[240] Anssi Paasi, "Region and Place: Regional Identity in Question," *Progress in Human Geography* 27, no. 4 (2003): 475–485. Also see Chapter 2 – „Theoretical Background"

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differently, which makes them not simply the consumers of meanings of regional identity, but also "simultaneously their contingent producers."[241] According to Fox-Miller and Indriss, the effectiveness of symbols lies precisely in their lack to not attract attention.[242] Even though some of the interviewed subjects complained on the availability of these symbols, it was implied from most of their answers that they are exposed to symbols like the Istrian anthem and Istrian goat, which is considered to be an emblem for the strength of Istrian man, quite a lot. This might result in implicit strengthening of feelings of regional belonging and groupness. A certain number of interviewed subjects already stated strong feeling of connection and belonging to Istria when hearing the anthem or seeing the picture of the goat.

Finally, the empirical research has proved that in the case of Istria, the existence of a shared regional identity does not necessarily mean the support for regional autonomy.[243] The number of the interviewed subjects who expressed explicit support for Istria as an autonomous region was significantly lower than the number expressing regional belonging and self-identifying with the region. Therefore, it is questionable whether a referendum on the autonomy of Istria would truly pass for now and whether it ever will.

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[241] Fox and Miller-Idriss, "Everyday Nationhood," 553.
[242] Ibid., 557.
[243] Regional identity can exist without the support for regional autonomy ever developing. [Keating, *The New Regionalism in Western Europe*, 88.]

5.   Conclusion

Significant changes were taking place throughout the 1990s in the nature and functions of the nation-state, and it seemed as if these changes were going to pave the way for regions to become more important policy actors in a wider European context.[244] Nevertheless, the initial European push towards regionalism has significantly weakened, and the level of commitment of the European Union to the notion of the 'Europe of the regions' is more of a fancy political rhetoric than it is, in reality, relevant on an institutional level. Notwithstanding this fact, nowadays we are witnessing the growth of the sub-state regionalism all over Europe, promoted by regional elites making constant appeals to 'Europe' and the idea of the 'Europe of the regions'.[245] It has to be pointed out that the existence of regionalism does not necessarily relate to regional identity, but in certain number of cases the existence of regional identity may lead to the occurrence of regionalism or *vice versa*. This relationship between regionalism and regional identity was studied in this thesis, focusing on the emergence of regional identitarian politics, and the impact of such rhetoric on the perceptions and identification of the locals in the richest and most multi-ethnic Croatian region, Istria.

The existence of a strong regional party, IDS-DDI and their charismatic leader Ivan Jakovcic, has only contributed to the promotion of such an identity. The party has been promoting the idea of *Istriannes* since the 1990s and has been strongly advocating the right of Istria to get the status of an autonomous region in Croatia. Jakovcic and IDS-DDI have been the key actors in promoting Istrian identity, and Istrian 'identity talk' and 'identity politics' have become most prominent during the past couple of years with Jakovcic stating that Istria will open the question on regional autonomy after the accession of Croatia to the EU, and that people will decide on a referendum. Analysis of the chosen interviews, statements and

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[244] John Loughlin, *„Europe of the Regions" and the Federalization of Europe*, (Publius: The Journal of Federalism, Vol 26, No. 4, Fall 1996), p. 141-162.
[245] See Chapter 2 – „Theoretical Background"

speeches by Jakovcic, in the period since 2000, shows that he is promoting the ideas of what he considers as a regional identity in order to gain support for their regionalist plans.[246] Jakovcic's main goal is regional autonomy of Istria, and there are two motives lying behind it. First, there are certainly economic motives. Jakovcic seeks to sell a picture of economically self-sustainable Istria and by presenting high level of centralization in Croatia as the main problem for the development of Istria, he posits cultural and financial autonomy as the solution to all of Istria's problems. The second motive behind the IDS' politics is the interest of a majoritarian group to maximize their political influence. In the case of autonomy, IDS-DDI would not need to consult the central government for every bigger decision they make, and they could make their own decisions on what to do and when to do it with free hands. Therefore, in order to achieve his main goal – regional autonomy – Jakovcic intentionally tries to establish Istrians as a distinctive group.

So, what is the impact of such rhetoric on the perception and identification of the locals? Despite Jakovcic being certain that 80% of Istrians would support the autonomy of Istria, the empirical analysis showed that regional identitarian politics does not have such an impact on the perceptions and identification of the locals. Despite the fact that large majority of the interviewed subjects, both from the younger and the older generation, expressed the importance of region in their life and emphasized belonging to Istria, their self-identifications is not exclusive of other types of identities, but its appeal finds its place among many other types of identifications. When describing themselves, people quite rarely used their national/regional belonging, but other terms like occupation, gender and religion; thus in everyday life, regional self-identification did not seem to be important.

As could be expected, regional-identification is inclusive, and which type of identification (regional, national or some other) will come to the fore depends on many

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[246] See Section 4.1. – „Analysis of the Politics from 'Above'"

conditions. For example, a larger number of people felt the need to self-identify regionally in the 1990s due to national centrist politics of the far-right national party, HDZ, while that number significantly decreased when the centre-left coalition came to power and promised decentralization of the country. Due to the economic crisis, the effects of (still) centralized national politics can be felt more strongly in Istria, which might be a good enough reason for the significant increase in the number of people self-identifying with the region. Furthermore, one can conclude that the strength of regional self-identification does not depend solely on the experience of living through more than one country which had the rule over Istria. Regional identity is clearly strongly embedded in family upbringing and kinship networks.

Going back to the categories imposed by the regional politicians when promoting the *Istrianness* and distinctiveness of Istrians, it seems that the people are buying into that only partly. I encountered a plethora of different views as to what the characteristics of 'typical Istrians' are, but it still seems that many do see Istria as a distinctive region, special because of its multiculturalism, and tolerance and respect toward everyone. The findings also indicate that Jakovcic's belief that he could get 80% of locals to vote 'yes' on the referendum is still far from true. Even though there is a general support for giving Istria more freedom to decide on its own matters, the explicit support for autonomy was quite scarce. However, since many respondents were not really willing to answer, it is hard to draw strong conclusions. Nevertheless, the results do indicate that more work needs to be done in order to reach the sufficient number of people who would vote 'yes' on a referendum for the autonomy of Istria.

What are the implications of these findings? On a practical level, the findings indicate three important things for Istria. First, holding a referendum on regional autonomy soon after entering the European Union would most probably not pass. If the regional leaders want to gain the necessary support, they should make more effort and wait for the right moment in order to initiate the referendum. Second, it might be time for a new generation of regional

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leaders to take their part in IDS-DDI, considering that quite a number of those interviewed believed it is time for Jakovcic to go to retirement, and let the younger generation to take power in the region. Third, the findings show surprisingly low level of sense of belonging to Europe, despite the fact that regional politicians have been promoting Istria as a region in the 'Europe of the regions' and emphasizing its European character.

For Croatia, the findings indicate three important things. First, the state centrist politics is clearly not sustainable anymore. The national government should revise its poor decentralization policies, and start working seriously on a plan to finally decentralize the country and give all its regions more autonomy. Second, Istria's possible regional autonomy might eventually lead to the federalization of the country, with all the Croatian regions opting for the status of an autonomous unit. Third, the findings indicate many respondents' skepticism towards the EU and benefits the country will have from it. This suggests the previous and the current governments have done quite a poor job in informing people on the benefits of the European Union and how to take maximum advantage of the opportunities that will be offered. At a time when the country is a little more than a month away from becoming a full member, the citizens should be well aware of what that membership is bringing them.

This research was limited in time and scope. Therefore, the future research should study more in-depth the support of the locals for regional autonomy. Such research should cover a representative sample, including all the different ethnicities living in Istria. A study could also be done on the support of the inhabitants of Istria for the separation of the region from Croatia and the creation of an independent state. Even though only one of those interviewed expressed her support for such an idea, she is not an isolated case in the whole region. By looking at the regional media, one could see that such an idea has already come to some people's mind. Even though right now it seems completely implausible that would happen, it can hardly be predicted what some (far) future holds.

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In conclusion, in the case of Istria, regional identity does not relate to regionalism and people's self-identification does not strongly correlate with the regional identification promoted by the leading regional political party and their leader Ivan Jakovcic. However, there are indications that with time, a sufficient number of people supporting autonomy could be formed in the future, and Istria could indeed opt for regional autonomy. Nevertheless, there is no indication for now that such autonomy would eventually lead to separation from the country, as some politicians on the national level fear, even though one interviewed subject did express support for the idea of Istria as an independent country. What the national government should do, considering the rising dissatisfaction of all the regions in Croatia, and not only Istria, is to finally carry out a true decentralization of the country. It might not stop the eventual autonomy of Istria in some (near) future, but it is a policy that has been postponed for too long a time.

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Appendix 1

Map 1. Istria and Croatia in the 16th century

Source: *Povijesni atlas za srednje škole (History Atlas for High Schools)*. Ivona Savić (Ed.).

Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 2009.

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Appendix 2

Map 2. Istria and Croatia 1929-1931

Source: *Hrvatski povijesni atlas (The Croatian Historical Atlas)*. Krešimir Regan (Ed.)

Zagreb:Leksikografski zavod Miroslav Krleža, 2003.

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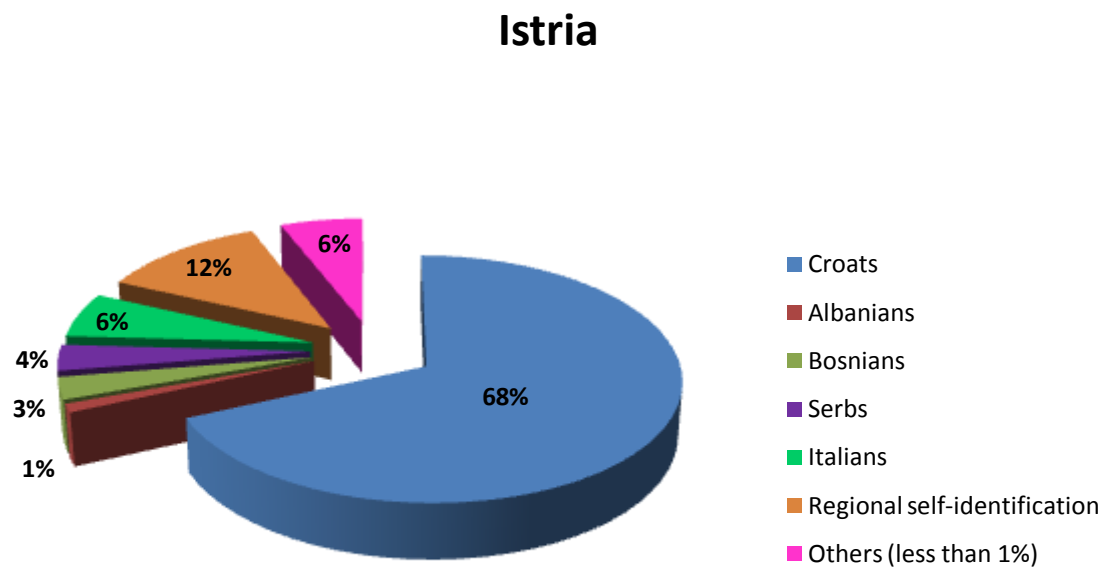**Appendix 3**

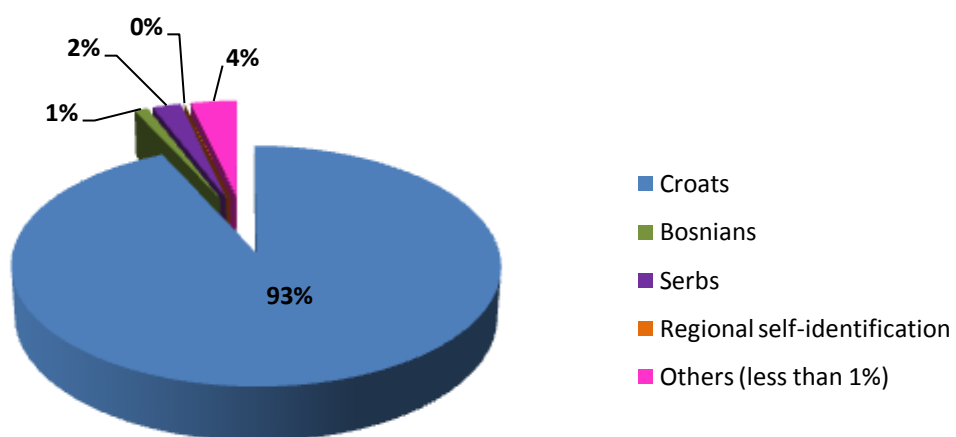Map 3. Istria in 21st century

Source: Bertić, I., Šehić, D., Šehić, D. *Geografski atlas Hrvatske (Geographical Atlas of*

Croatia), Zagreb: Europapress holding d.o.o., 2005.

Appendix 4

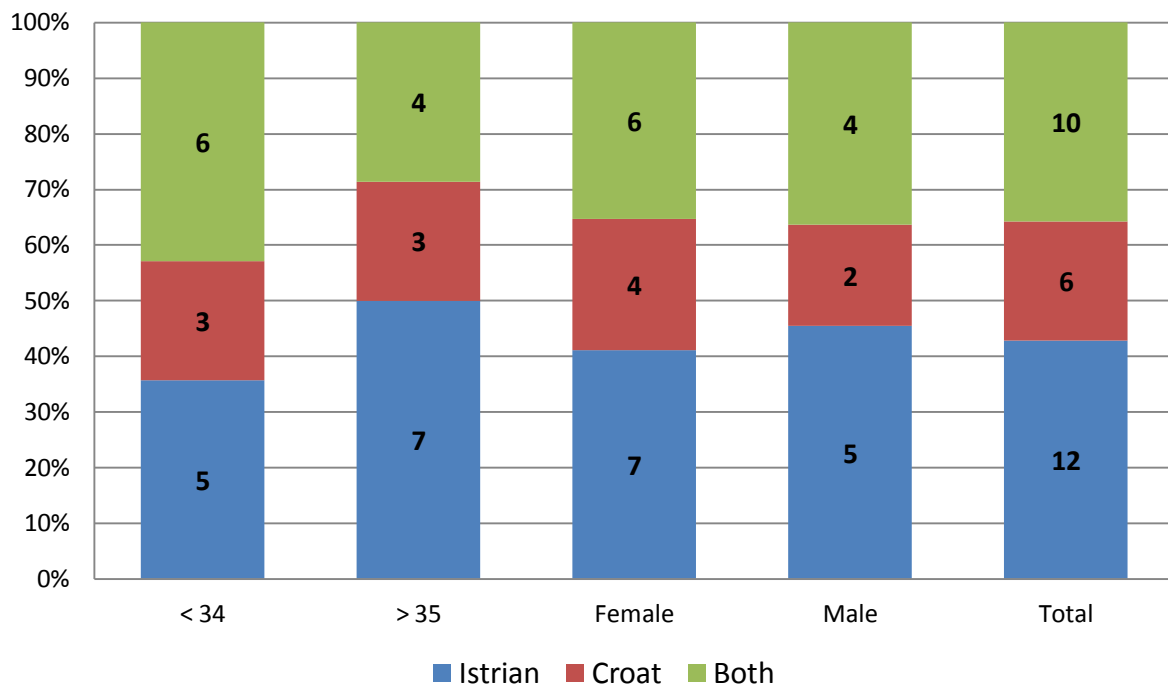Graph 1. The structure of population according to nationality

Istria

- Croats — 68%
- Albanians — 1%
- Bosnians — 3%
- Serbs — 4%
- Italians — 6%
- Regional self-identification — 12%
- Others (less than 1%) — 6%

The City of Zagreb

- Croats — 93%
- Bosnians — 1%
- Serbs — 2%
- Regional self-identification — 0%
- Others (less than 1%) — 4%

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Graph 2. Self-identification of the local people

Graph 3. Comparison of regional self-identification with the support for regional autonomy