

# An analysis of the concept of locality on the example of Slovenia's new-wave music scene

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## Abstract

In this paper, the concept of locality is problematised through perceiving the relationship between the global and the local on the example of the new-wave music scene that developed in Yugoslavia at the beginning of the 1980s from the Slovenian perspective. Created initially in London and New York, punk and then new wave sparked the development of an authentic music scene in Yugoslavia. Singing in the local languages and dealing with local themes made these music genres a local musical and cultural phenomenon, which is the underlying thesis of this paper. The theoretical framework in which that thesis is considered is founded on understanding new wave as a cultural phenomenon and the observation of the correlation between the concepts of music and the place through the notion of the music scene. The analysis has shown that new wave can be considered to be a local music phenomenon because an authentic music scene existed during the 1980s, but also that, in that period, punk was present to a greater extent, so, according to the respondents' perception, it is a more significant local marker than new wave.

KEYWORDS: new wave, punk, music scene, local identity, Slovenia

## New wave as a research field

The end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s were marked by the appearance of a new music expression, which first manifested through punk, then through new wave.<sup>1</sup> The specificity of those music genres was not only mirrored in music, thematic, and instrumental innovations, but also in a distinctive view of the world. The central thesis in this paper is based on the idea that global music (such as new wave and punk) should become local through its everyday use and adaptation to the environment in which it is performed (see Bennett & Peterson 2004; Urquia 2004). Studying the authenticity concept on the example of the London Salsa Scene, Urquia problematises the "genre ownership" idea (concretely salsa, but it is also applicable to any music genre). Although I am not using the terms *ownership* or *possession* in this paper, I do observe the West in the context of new

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<sup>1</sup> New wave implies the expression of a new style in the film, philosophy, literature (see, for example, Neupert 2007; Monaco 2004; McLaughlin 2001), but in this paper, it primarily refers to music.

wave similarly as the starting point, whereas I refer to Yugoslavia's scene as "local" and "authentic", and through the analysis, I shall also demonstrate the reasons why. Namely, in their mutual interaction, music and place equally influence identity formation. In other words, music creates a certain place (see Harris 2000; Cohen 1991; 1995; 2007; Kruse 2003; 2005; Connell & Gibson 2004), but a particular place also influences the kind of music that will arise out of it, as well the kind of message it will be conveying. Music is an expression of the creators living in a particular environment influencing their ideas, aspirations, (dis)satisfactions, and creativity. All those influences, perhaps invisible at first sight, are reflected to a great extent through music in different ways (e.g., the presence of certain genres, a choice of topics, etc.). Writing about the relationship between the global and the local on the example of the death metal scene, Keith Harris (2000) observes how the music production of the place is performed through a selection of instruments, motifs and music styles. The musician consciously makes a certain selection so as to give shape to the music message, which the audience will interpret in its own way. Music establishes a specific relation with the audience and is transformed through that relation, but it also influences the audience by being an essential part of their lives or at least a significant part of the personal or collective identity (Harris 2000; Urquia 2004). In this paper, the correlation between music and the place is studied through the notion of the music scene:

We view a local scene to be a focused social activity that takes place in a delimited space and over a specific span of time in which clusters of producers, musicians, and fans realize their common musical taste, collectively distinguishing themselves from others by using music and cultural signs often appropriated from other places, but recombined and developed in ways that come to represent the local scene (Bennett & Peterson 2004: 8).

Keith Harris (2000) also has a similar view of the notion of the scene, pointing out that we are speaking about a notion more flexible than subculture because it offers a broader space for music production, i.e., a context of music practices of its own kind. The flexibility of the music scene is reflected in its changeability since, no matter how apparent that might be at first glance, the scene is not a constant category. For example, the data about one's belonging to a particular music scene may only be interpreted at the current moment, given that the scene incessantly exudes happenings, the mixtures and overlapping of different elements; old scenes disappear, and new ones emerge (Harris 2000). It is not a rare case that musicians themselves avoid any determinant whatsoever of a genre or scene, because they consider creativity to be a category impossible to seize, one that cannot be limited by concepts. Nevertheless, every theoretical analysis requires a certain conceptual constancy so as to allow the examination of particular elements, for which reason I am using the notion of the music scene in this paper to mark all those "music elements and practices" that may be considered as local and authentic, as well as changeable.

In order to make it possible to analytically perceive new wave, it is necessary to identify its basic parameters. In the literature dealing with the Yugoslav new-wave phenomenon, two directions of its determination are possible to observe: 1) coexistence with punk and 2) young people's rebellion against the existing values, with an aspiration

towards freely expressing themselves. Every story about new wave also carries in itself a story about punk. A more detailed analysis of this assertion leads us to the conclusion that those two phenomena are impossible to observe separately for several reasons. First, chronologically observed, although punk was created first, both punk and new wave could be said to have existed in parallel with one another at the zenith of their popularity and to have simultaneously unavoidably strongly influenced each other. Punk created a suitable ground for the creation of a phenomenon such as new wave. According to some authors, it is also quite justifiable to say that new wave was created as a reaction of its own kind to punk, in the sense of its negation through the introduction of the synthesiser, which resulted in slower melodies and more elegant poses (Smiljanić 2012). For that reason, new wave is represented as less radical and less subversive music, 'its less radical and more broadly accepted reflection' (Prca 1990: 23) or yet as 'the energy shaped by punk' (Sadžakov 2012: 97). By that, new wave became what punk never was, its opposite (aggressive – elegant, noise – slow melodies). When speaking about that contradiction, however, it should be highlighted that punk and new wave were, in a certain sense, I would rather say different, than contradictory. Yet, if we were to compare new wave with popular music or classical rock-n-roll (which new wavers clearly and loudly themselves distance from), a different grouping may be observed, according to which punk and new wave are classified together, whereas classical rock-n-roll, folk and popular music would be the Others (see Ristivojević 2014). In his introductory explanation of new wave, Teo Cateforis (2011: 2) highlights exactly that distancing from rock-n-roll until that time, emphasising that 'new wave signified the dissatisfaction that many musicians and fans felt with the rock status quo.'

The other direction of determining new wave would rest on understanding new wave as young people's rebellion against the existing values and systems, and their aspiration towards freedom (see Gregurić 2012). Such a determinant also indicates the bias which new wave had compared with the existing rock-n-roll scene, in a music sense, but also the overall social context of that time. Music was used to run away from rules and from any limits and disciplines whatsoever at all levels. Therefore, certain authors see new wave as 'the rebellious-creative breaking of old music forms and reasoning, simultaneously carrying a new orientation towards the social context' (Sadžakov 2012: 83) or as individualisation (Vukašinović 2012).

Some authors also understand Yugoslav new wave as a subcultural phenomenon tightly connected with the urban environment, while simultaneously using the determinant *urban* as the key point of identification, based on which the young create their identity, as well as a rebellion against the dominant socialist culture and parental norms (see Božilović 2013). In the context of this story, freedom can be understood in two different ways: as a rebellion against social and cultural disciplines, and also as a rebellion against the existing condition in music. Namely, new wave advocates the idea (which was initiated by punk) that it is not important whether someone knows how to play, or whether he/she has music education, but it is the message he/she is conveying. The rules that had been imposed on playing were being abandoned, and efforts were being made to create something new by also using new instruments such as a different guitar or synthesiser. In

that sense, stylistic indetermination is also characteristic of new wave, so it can be interpreted as ‘a conglomerate of heterogeneous styles’ (Ristivojević 2014: 87).

Given the fact that we are speaking about the phenomenon that emerged and disappeared while Yugoslavia still existed, the research context must also be Yugoslav. As I have been dealing with the “Belgrade side” of the story in my research studies so far (Ristivojević 2011, 2012, 2014), in this paper I endeavour to make the analysis more complete by presenting new wave from the Slovenian perspective. The research I conducted for the needs of my doctoral thesis<sup>2</sup> showed that this phenomenon has certain features that could be marked as “narrower locality”,<sup>3</sup> for which reason this analysis represents a further deepening of that topic. The paper is aimed at doing research in the *locality of new wave* in the Slovenian context. Locality implies the characteristic features that have developed in the contact of new wave with a local environment. In connection with that, the basic research questions I am posing concern the reception and perception of new wave in Slovenia: the determination of new wave, acceptance of that phenomenon, its local characteristics such as bands, gathering places, the media, as well as its popularity amongst the local population.

## **Constructing new wave as a local phenomenon**

The basic material for the analysis consists of in-depth interviews with four respondents, which I made in Izola, Ljubljana, and Koper during May 2013.<sup>4</sup> The informants are the contemporaries of new wave, namely those who were high-schoolers and students during the 1980s, lived in Slovenia, and listened to that kind of music. This a selection of the respondents was encouraged by the awareness that such testimonies are filled with multi-layered meanings. On the one hand, the respondents are the witnesses of that time, whereas, on the other, they look at it from a distance of forty years, which certainly contributes to the variety of semantic constructions. The fact that all the respondents lived (and still live) in Slovenia is certainly also a significant criterion because in that manner an authentic insight into the condition on the 1980s local scene is obtained. Although some of my informants are musicians (only one is still active, the two other are former players), this was not a necessary criterion. The questions are thematically structured, starting from the determination of new wave, then discussing new wave in Yugoslavia and specifically in Slovenia through the identification of local bands, an assessment of the presence of that kind of music, and its presence in the media of that time.

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<sup>2</sup> I defended my doctoral thesis entitled: *The Role of Music in the Formation of a Local Identity at the Ethnology and Anthropology Department of the Belgrade Faculty of Philosophy* in 2012.

<sup>3</sup> The narrower locality in this sense would refer to the concrete cities or places (e.g., Ljubljana, Koper, Zagreb, Belgrade), whereas the mark of a broader locality would refer to the Yugoslav space.

<sup>4</sup> Despite the objective limitations I had during the research (quite a short stay in Slovenia), and the fact that it was impossible to reach a larger number of respondents during that stay, the number of the informants would not have been substantially greater since the basic goal of the paper is to recognise by the analysis of individual perceptions the manner in which locality construction processes are performed through music, which more importantly required that we be adhering to a qualitative rather than quantitative methodology.

## **New (punk) wave: From reception to perception**

I first spoke with the respondents about their associations with new wave understood in the broadest sense. What is common to all is that new wave is experienced as something reaching beyond music, while simultaneously they point out the importance of the social moment. For example, one of the answers reads: new wave is 'a group of friends listening to music and watching movies' (Informant 1, male, 2013). A statement like this makes it possible to conclude that new wave may also be defined from a social perspective, as a cohesive element bringing together people of the same or a similar interest, which is not exclusively related to music, but may also refer to a movie, comics, literature, lifestyle, dressing style, or another factor. In that sense, music is only one element of that determination:

It was certainly not just some music movement, but a phenomenon of that time, since I've been going through my memories a little from yesterday to today and I've also remembered the movies and books and other stuff, exactly connected with Belgrade, since ... I don't know ... the beginning with Momo Kapor's *Foliranti* to Sonja Savić's *Una*, actually all. But it's clear that music was certainly some moment in time connecting all that (Informant 1, male, 2013).

It is possible to observe from this statement that new wave is not experienced as a sort of "Slovenian" particularity, but rather as a Yugoslav phenomenon. The mentioned examples (the movie *Una* and the book *Foliranti*) are associatively linked first to the 1980s, then to the capital of the then federal state, Belgrade. Those associations are first of all of cultural nature; that is, they do not relate that much to the physical place as they do to the common values personified in these works. Although Momo Kapor wrote his book *Foliranti* in the mid-1970s, and the plot takes place in the Belgrade of the 1960s (which only demonstrates how relative and subjective one's comprehension of time can be), the respondent connected it with the story of new wave and the 1980s. What actually is the common denominator of new wave, the story of the 1980s, the mentioned book and film, is the motif of rebellion, the questioning and relocation of the borders. The demonstrations of the ways of life of a certain group of people, their growing up, stepping into the world of adults, living by their wits in a big city, love relations, ways of entertaining make the identity elements to which an individual links him-/herself and with which he/she identifies. By virtue of the abovestated, the mentioned movie and book could be said to be the elements of the associative series closely connected with the experience of the new wave of the 1980s, as well as the 1980s themselves in the respondent's perception (which means that it does not need to be so for all those who identify themselves with new wave). Such a voluntary selection from a corpus of semantic elements constructs a perception of a certain phenomenon, and for that reason I consider those notions to be authentic. This is supported by the very fact that the other respondents did not mention these examples in their reminiscences of new wave.

In conversation with the respondents, another type of associations prompted by new wave also crystallised: it is not rare that an association to new wave is some form

of a nostalgic relation to the past,<sup>5</sup> specifically, to the time of one's youth: 'those really were those experiences of my youth, high-school, questioning of this or that' (Informant 1, male, 2013). To speak about new wave today with the people who lived in that time and followed that music phenomenon is inseparable from the story of their youth, and simultaneously is a construct of its own kind made of small segments of remembrance, as well as of the subsequent experiences weaved into that perception.<sup>6</sup> In that sense, the 1980s are a specific decade since they preceded the 1990s, which are experienced in all parts of the former Yugoslavia as dark times due to the wars waged among the former republics, which resulted in the disintegration of the federal state. Today, one group refers to the 1980s as "the golden era", "the careless era", "the time of nice life" (in comparison with the 1990s and the present time), whereas others remember them in not such a care-less and free light, so they give advantage in their memories to power cuts, shortages of petrol, coffee, and the social disciplines imposed on them. The narratives based on reminiscences (collective, media-promoted, and individual) not only create the notions of the times gone by but also 'are a mechanism for the assessment of the present condition and situation' (Mijić 2011: 230). When mentioned in the new-wave context, the 1980s are still reputed mainly as "the good time", "the time of good music and culture" among the respondents and in public narratives, too. In the majority of cases, the relation towards youth implies a positive and a little nostalgic relation to the new-wave phenomenon, so such views may also be interpreted in that sense.<sup>7</sup> New wave could be said to appear in those narratives as a soundtrack for memories of young days.

One of the respondents placed the story of new wave in the context of the socialist society of Yugoslavia, and as his story develops it becomes clear that punk had a more significant and more powerful role in that context than new wave did:

I think it was quite a strong thing based on music to a great extent, but apart from that, there were so many other things. I think that, in some way, at a very basic level, socialism was a problem at that time since it failed to articulate, channel young people's overall energy, and when punk appeared, which was of minor importance, then all at once everybody recognised themselves, saw a possibility ... so that, even today, if you watch Slovenia's public life here, people in politics, marketing, business, every imaginable thing, a really great number of them grew up through punk in principle. Not necessarily due to that because, in some other context, they would be punkers, but because that was simply the only thing at that time that was interesting, dynamic, enabling you to do some things... It was more as an idea about, against repression, this classless society that's all OK, but without the system's pressures (Informant 2, male, 2013).

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<sup>5</sup> About the theoretical-term framework for studying nostalgia, see Antonijević, Kovačević and Trebješanić 2013a and 2013b.

<sup>6</sup> It would be also worth, however, bearing in mind that, at the time of making the interviews, the respondents were between fifty and fifty-five years of age, and that their roles had changed, too, already due to the very fact that they are mature adults, which, in their case, is currently closer to old age than youth. About old age as a social construct and the deprivations accompanying it, see Milosavljević 2017.

<sup>7</sup> About Yugo-nostalgic comprehensions as the Yugoslav cultural heritage, see Kovačević 2011; Gavrilović 2011; Mijić 2011.

The respondent's previously referenced statement confirms and strengthens the experience of new wave and punk as social and cultural phenomena reaching beyond music, although based on it. The influence of new wave and punk reflects in that they gathered together the people sharing the same view of the world, the individuals troubled by the same problems and dilemmas, who express their wishes for, pursuits of and aspirations towards a change of some kind by means of music. We should notice that punk was trying to problematise the then society and system (without any idea of overthrowing such a system), expressing disagreement regarding its repressive methods. If the motifs for the emergence of punk in Great Britain and in Yugoslavia were to compare from the standpoint of the sociocultural context the differences would immediately become visible. Punk was originally created as the music through which one could demonstrate rebellion against the class society, whereas Yugoslavia was organised as a classless society, for which reason it was not particularly sensible to develop ideas in that direction. It is exactly in such differences that local characteristics of some "global" music genres can manifest, and it is reasonable to speak about their authentic local variants because music adapts to the environment in which it is created and played. Music is an important integral segment not only of group identities but also individual ones. In this case, new wave and, even more so, punk create the identity backbone of the collective identity of "the young", as well as the personal identity of each one of them individually. New wave and punk enabled the segment of the generation that was young in the 1980s a possibility (some even consider it to have been the only possibility) of expressing their energy, wishes, opinions, perceptions, to express themselves and position themselves in the society on their own, not only at the given moment, but also in their further life. It is good to emphasise the fact that such an identity positioning was not exclusive given that both those who listened to new wave and those who, for example, listened to disco music, which (from the point of view of value) was its opposite and regarding the identity – *the Other*, socialised with each other. So, music was the marker, but identity groups were not hermetically closed:

Now ... I don't know, I could just as some friends of mine from that broader company not listen to new wave, but listen to I don't know the disco of the 1980s, wear those ... I remember them being wide and tight down there, it was always "yuck" to me, but I had friends who were OK with it and we're still friends when we meet (Informant 1, male, 2013).

As has already been mentioned, some respondents do not observe new wave separately from punk, or they experience those two movements as separate but synergic because one cannot exist without the other:

You see, there were such things, and on the other hand, there were many groups who were exactly new wave although I think that the punk movement somehow mixed with new wave in the then Yugoslavia and all that moved from the one into the other somehow organically (Informant 4, male, 2013).

The research, however, showed that, despite that synergetic quality, all the respondents highlighted the greater importance of punk in Slovenia. In their opinions, new

wave did exist, it is perceived as a separate phenomenon (yet connected with punk), but it was not present so much that it would represent a crucial characteristic of the Slovenian 1980s music scene (some did not even use the term ‘new wave’). The majority of the answers given by the respondents refer to a conclusion that new wave in Slovenia is actually something that was out of the limelight in comparison with the punk movement that was much more pronounced and that could be characterised as a Slovenian “specific”:

I think that maybe the one first Slovenian “specific” in that respect is that this term was not quite present with us at all, as new wave, but much stronger, you know... exactly punk. There are many various reasons for that, but in principle what emerged very quickly was punk and what we called “alternative trends”, those things. Then what followed this new wave was strong in Zagreb and Belgrade, and more broadly, it was also here, but it wasn’t that strong (Informant 4, male, 2013).

Already there is an explicit emphasis on a single local specificity when that phenomenon is concerned. The Slovenian 1980s scene was rather punk, whereas new wave was more present in Zagreb and Belgrade.<sup>8</sup> That does not mean that there was no new wave scene in Slovenia, (chiefly in Ljubljana as an urban centre), but rather that, differently from punk, it was not strong enough. Speaking about these phenomena, the respondents frequently mentioned a physical appearance (the hairstyle, clothes) and connected these genres with it, which testifies to how inclusive these phenomena are of, apart from music, some other determinants of one’s personal identity. How someone dressed in that time, what hairstyle they might have had, spoke much about the music they listened to or what they were inclined to. So, while speaking about punkers in his place of living, one of the respondents highlighted that they were the kids who had “a little coloured hair”. Based on such and similar observations, a complex relation between music and the place is noticed, resulting in the determination of both music and the place. The story about new wave in Slovenia, at least when my respondents’ perceptions are in question, has shown that new wave ‘is not linked’ that much to the Slovenian context as it is to Belgrade and Zagreb. Such a perception carries in itself an arbitrary correlation between new wave and specific cities. Some regard Belgrade and Zagreb as a “personification of new wave”, and it is one of the first associations that mention these cities, which speaks about the power music has when certain notions are created. Also, a certain place produces a specific kind of music, so some of my Belgrade respondents established and especially emphasised the difference between the *Belgrade*, *Zagreb* and *Sarajevo* sounds.<sup>9</sup>

The Slovenian 1980s music scene was not uniform: there were internal differences depending on whether a smaller-size or bigger city was in question. One of the respondents born in Koper considers it possible to make a distinction between Ljubljana and mainland Slovenia, on the one hand, and coastal Slovenia, on the other, because he considers the punk scene, like the new wave one, to have been very weak on the coast

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<sup>8</sup> It is interesting that the other urban centres of the former federal republics, such as Skopje, Podgorica, and Sarajevo are not mentioned in one single context.

<sup>9</sup> For more information, see Ristivojević 2014.

area.<sup>10</sup> In his opinion, Ljubljana was the centre of music and cultural happenings, whereas in the coastal area, there were fewer such events:

I don't know, maybe I'm being unjust, but it seems to me that it was never some alternative and the strong punk scene, on the coast. There were a few people. They may've been in Ankaran, there were some bands trying something with electronics, something like that, newer, but that never quite got rooted there (Informant 3, male, 2013).

It arises from another respondent's answer that punk, and new wave with it, are in fact comprehended as one single genre in comparison, say, with disco and heavy metal, which were popular then. Once again, however, it is highlighted that that division into genres was only relevant to some extent because all the respondents point out that they were experimenting with music choices and that they and their friends listened to what they liked at that moment, regardless of the genre that might have belonged to:<sup>11</sup>

I'd hardly say that anyone exclusively listened to that genre or that I'd say that genre meant much to us then. There was a bit of punk and heavy metal there, and almost nothing of the other stuff. There were heavy metal fans fighting in some way, and I don't know what, beating those punkers, three of them in Koper, but it was much more developed in Ljubljana, punk. Now, if you ask me about new wave, I'm not quite certain if there was any, what was there (Informant 4, male, 2013).

The previous enables us to conclude that new wave is a phenomenon of heterogeneous meaning, incorporating reminiscences of youth, of the 1980s, of certain music, books, movies, lifestyles, and other forms of entertainment. Apart from that, it is closely linked to the punk phenomenon, which, according to my respondents, is more significant to the Slovenian context. Punk is experienced as the expression of rebellion through music, as a specific manner of thinking, which was related to new wave, but differed from it in its presence and the development of the scene itself, as well as regarding its phenomenal characteristics, while simultaneously punk is characterised as "more shattering", "more dynamic", "harder-edged", whereas new wave is its "softer" and "more reconciling" version.

## ***Bands as a personification of the locality of new wave and punk***

To gain insight into the direction in which the respondents were thinking about new wave when bands are concerned (whether the world scene or the local scene prevails and which locality is in question), I asked them to name the bands, either foreign or domestic, which

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<sup>10</sup> Which is the data disclosing that punk is not perceived in that way, either, in all parts of Slovenia, although some respondents understand it as an important Slovenian music phenomenon.

<sup>11</sup> The research experience from the Belgrade field speaks in contrast: there was a clear difference drawn between those who listened to punk and new wave and all others. That difference was personified in different clubs and different gathering places in the city.

they consider to be genre markers. The majority of the respondents pointed out that, in that time, they ‘were listening to all that was going on in Yugoslavia, as well as the groups beyond that scene, such as *The Stranglers* and *The Residents*’. Despite the different opinions about whether some band was punk or new-wave, they all mentioned *The Stranglers* and *The Clash* bands, which indicates that they all listened to them, but viewed them differently in some sense:

I liked *The Police* in that time, and I still like them very much. That was quite often heard. That could’ve been heard of a bit better music, otherwise ... I don’t know, then *Iron Maiden* was listened to, everybody loved it, I myself never did too much... We also listened to *The Clash* (Informant 4, male, 2013).

Two problematic points appear in this answer. First, there is the entanglement of new wave and punk, those who are generally recognised as punk bands (e.g., *The Clash*) and those belonging to new wave (*The Stranglers*,<sup>12</sup> *The Police*) are also mentioned. The heterogeneous determination is expanded by the mention of the bands such as *The Residents* and the heavy-metal band *Iron Maiden*. What links those bands is the period in which they were very popular, which the respondents spoke about. When the categorisation of their music is in question, however, they have no common points. So, the respondent spoke about what was listened to in the crowd, not strictly about what of new wave they listened to. That leads us further to conclude that the meanings punk and new wave have for the respondents are very tensile and subjective. For example, one of the informants points out that, to him, ‘neither *The Stranglers* nor *The Clash* is punk’ (Informant 3, male, 2013). It is interesting that, when speaking about foreign punk bands, not a single respondent mentioned the *Sex Pistols* group, an icon of punk.

When speaking about local bands, the groups that might be classified under ‘the narrower locality’ determinant, i.e., Slovenian bands, are first mentioned, whereas in all the other answers, the bands of ‘the broader locality’, i.e., Yugoslav (Belgrade’s and Zagreb’s first of all) are also present. Among the Slovenian punk bands are *Pankrti*, *Berlinski zid*, *Ljubljanski psi*, *Grupa 92*, *Kuzle*, *Šund*, *Niet*, *Deseti brat*, *Otpadki civilizacije*, whereas the new-wave bands mentioned by the respondents are: *Lačni Franc*, *Otroci socializma*, *Čao pičke*, and *Videosex*. *Buldožer* also appears in the answers as a very important Slovenian band, yet remaining unclassified in the punk-new wave classification. The majority of the mentioned bands are from Ljubljana, which confirms the role this city played as a centre of music and cultural happenings:

Ljubljana strongly supported punk. They did have a few more bands, I don’t know their names, but...and in Maribor, there was *Lačni Franz*, and they were a little ... at least I think so, I always treated them that way, and if I were to listen to them now I don’t know if I’d say that, but ... then I considered them as a punk band (Informant 1, male, 2013).

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<sup>12</sup> For a yet more illustrative example of the duplicate comprehension and grouping of certain bands, see the example of *The Stranglers* in Ristivojević 2014: 114–15.

When speaking about the bands with the “Yugoslav” label, the respondents mentioned *Riblja čorba*, *EKV*, *Idoli*, *Šarlo akrobata*, *Azra*, *Đavoli*, *Električni orgazam*, *Film*, *Haustor*, and *Zabranjeno pušenje*. This list also shows how broadly comprehensive the new wave and punk determinants are. For example, the group *Riblja čorba* could not be classified either as punk or new-wave according to any criterion (neither musically nor conceptually); certain new-wave musicians even clearly distanced themselves from all they considered to be “classical rock-n-roll”. One of the respondents said that, to him, the *Šarlo akrobata* group (a personification of new wave from the Belgrade perspective) did not sound like new wave, but rather like punk, and that the *EKV* was something that, in his opinion, might be classified as new wave:

I, for example, would never classify *Idoli* and *Električni orgazam* into new wave, that's another kind of music to me, only the *EKV*. To me, *Idoli* and *Električni orgazam* are some kind of rock-n-roll punk, inclining a little to rockabilly ... different, and the *EKV* were exactly new wave, which, to me, is an idea of a good, quality new wave. There was a bit of that from the West. *Talking Heads*, maybe (Informant 4, male, 2013).

The preceding statement is entirely contrary to that of the other respondent who states that, to him, with regards to new wave, *Idoli* was “group number one”. This example, as well as the example mentioned above of *The Clash*, speaks in favour of the thesis about the subjectivity of the genre differentiation. The most impressive is the flexibility and construction of the genre borders because it quite depends on the subjective experience of both the music itself and the genre determinant itself. The listener has a certain opinion about what punk is, and in compliance with that, he/she does or does not classify some group under that determinant. It also applies to new wave, which, it seems, the respondents comprehend even more broadly and more diversely. The fact that the respondents marked a large number of Slovenian bands as punk and new wave, which indicates the existence of the local authenticity of the music that was being created, is certainly also significant. Apart from the language, which is the first visible characteristic of the local identity in songs (and almost all the bands were creating in Slovenian), the songs' themes are also an important indicator because they reflect everyday life of the society in which one lives.

### **Gathering places as an important identity marker**

The development of any music scene is in a causal-consequential relationship with the existence of the local places that might be linked to that scene. Regarding these places, I imply not only the public places directly connected with music (such as concert spaces, clubs, cafés), but also public gathering places (parks, drugstores, yards, etc.), i.e., all those *non-formal* places the lovers of a concrete music mark as significant for some reason. For example, the gathering of the fans of a certain kind of music in a small park not only has a meaningful social dimension (socialising, making friendships) but is also significant when speaking about the development of a specific music scene. Specifically, in such places, people make acquaintances and friendships, exchange ideas, discuss different top-

ics, which is an essential segment of the music scene understood in a broader sense. In order for a music scene to exist in an environment, it is necessary that there be a developed publishing activity, record companies, music stores, as well as the audience's response and the different forms of non-formal socialising that are connected with music. In that sense, the local music scene can be spoken about as a focused social activity (Bennett & Peterson 2004), as a continuous exchange between musicians and the audience, which produces numerous meanings of the scene itself.

When speaking about new wave and punk in Slovenia, the respondents speak about several important local points that gathered together the lovers of that sound. The mentioned key place in Koper is *Mladinski kulturni centar* (MKC), today known as *Mladinski, kulturni, socialni in multimedijski center* (MKSMC). One of the respondents points out that Marko Breclj from the *Buldožer* group ran that centre, but on the webpage of *The Association of the Friends of Moderate Progress* it relates to the period from 1991 to 2015.<sup>13</sup> At this point, there is a time discrepancy since the topic discussed relates to the 1980s, whereas the activity of the centre began in the 1990s. Even such a discrepancy, however, may be interpreted as an indicator of its own kind of the significance of some place to a concrete local environment in a music sense. Regarding Ljubljana, the respondents name the places such as *Bunker*, *Studentski dom*, *ŠKUC*, discotheques, small parks, and private parties, as well as organised high school parties. Apart from institutionally organised parties and the existing clubs, certain city points were important gathering places. So, one of the informants stated that there had been a place in Ljubljana where punkers gathered together:

In Ljubljana, for example, near the Maxi Market if you know, for some time, then that was the most modern shopping place, and then punkers would be hanging around there and vomiting (laughs). Then that was in a park, and when I came that was in another park (Informant 2, male, 2013).

The other also important gathering place was the students' dormitories, both in the context of individual students' rooms and in the meaning of the clubs that worked in that home. We should mention that there were not many such places and that they were not spacious, which leads us to conclude that not a large number of people gathered there. One of the respondents describes in detail his experience of one of the 'punk' spaces he had visited:

There were a couple of those students' points, and more or less all happened in the dormitories, in the rooms, apartments, there were ... in one of the homes in the students' settlement ... in the cellar ... there were a few spaces where... where there were also the so-called disco clubs, not quite classical, where those things were happening (Informant 1, male, 2013).

The respondents cited *Študentski kulturni center* (*ŠKUC*) as an important "collective centre" for new-wave and punk lovers. Located in Ljubljana, it was established in 1972, and during the 1980s it was the centre of events relating to the alternative cultural

<sup>13</sup> [http://www.culture.si/en/Association\\_of\\_the\\_Friends\\_of\\_Moderate\\_Progress](http://www.culture.si/en/Association_of_the_Friends_of_Moderate_Progress)

scene. The festivals that were organised under its auspices during the 1980s were: *Rock in Opposition Festival* (1980–1984), *Ankaran/Coastal Scene Festival* (1987–1994) and *New Rock* (1981–2003).<sup>14</sup> Two respondents mention *ŠKUC* as an important place: ‘In Ljubljana there was *ŠKUC*, and concerts in *Križanke*’<sup>15</sup>, as well as:

I think that exactly in the 1980s there was some great constellation of people in Ljubljana. Almost everybody around Radio Študent who also had quite a good ear for music also had some organisational possibilities, so they started somehow ... yes, *Študentski kulturni center ŠKUC*, they had their own, as they call it *založba* (exhibition), *ŠKUC ROPOT*, so they began to produce some cassettes and suchlike stuff of these punk bands from Ljubljana and more broadly from Slovenia, some compilations (Informant 1, male, 2013).

The existence of an official youth cultural centre such as *ŠKUC* in Ljubljana or *SKC*<sup>16</sup> in Belgrade in that time meant a possibility of these scenes’ development because such institutions were mainly the epicentre of the events connected with the current music happenings. Due to the organisation of festivals and play sessions, the music scene was developing its identity, and the communication channels between musicians and the audience were multiplying. In that way, musicians were given a possibility to express themselves and promote their creative work, whereas the audience was enabled to become familiar with new kinds of music and become ‘a part of the scene’ by regularly visiting such happenings.

## **New wave and punk in the local context – an alternative or mainstream?**

In this paper, the expansion and general acceptance of that music genre in a specific local environment are taken as a criterion of the popularity of new wave in Slovenia in the 1980s.<sup>17</sup> The goal I set is to recognise how the respondents think of it today, specifically whether they observe new wave as something alternative or popular then. Apart from the individual perceptions of and impressions about the popularity of this music and cultural phenomenon, the number of the places where that sound was possible to hear, concert halls, clubs (which has already been spoken about), as well as the availability of the sound carrier, records in this case, and the presence in the media can be additional indicators.

In that sense, the questions I asked my respondents in this interview stage concern the presence of new wave in the media (on the radio, the television, in the press), and also how much they and their friends were travelling in that time. The question about journeys first of all relates to the so-called “music journeys”, meaning a journey for the purpose of visiting some concert or festival or in order to buy records.

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/skuc.association/>

<sup>15</sup> The implication is of the open theatre in Križanke.

<sup>16</sup> The abbreviation of the Students’ Cultural Center.

<sup>17</sup> The popularity concept is frequently perceived through a comparison between popular and high cultures (see Adorno & Horkheimer 1989; Fisk 2001). In this paper, however, that is not the case; popularity is exclusively spoken about based on what the respondents imply under that term.

The informants generally do not consider punk and new wave to have been particularly popular in Slovenia with regard to media coverage of this phenomenon, first because the shows in which that kind of music was broadcast were rare:

I really can't recall there were any such ones anywhere ... I rarely heard it, yes, it was heard sometimes; otherwise, I wouldn't've known of those bands, but rarely. If you had money to buy a cassette or if you recorded something from the radio ... hardly, there weren't quite many (Informant 4, male, 2013).

Yet, it was some sort of alternative, not mainstream. How some things were pretty much conservative, everybody knew of *Pankrti* for sure. Their first single was already *Ljubljana bulana*, and that was, what are these now saying something ... (laughs) but exactly because of that, that was absolutely played, but that was never mainstream in principle (Informant 2, male, 2013).

At first sight, it would be easy to conclude that new wave and punk were limited to a narrower circle of people and were thus not a particularly popular phenomenon due to that. One respondent's answer, however, indicates yet another important phenomenon: despite the "narrower", maybe more closed fan circle as well, the echoes of punk, then of new wave, too, were stronger ("everybody knew of *Pankrti*"), so they were also heard of by those who were not their followers and listeners. It arises from the said that the popularity concept, in this case, is very complex because a phenomenon can be known although it is not mainstream. The "echoes" of new wave and, first of all, punk had in the Slovenian context also indicate a novelty – the fact that they attracted attention of a broader social community (either approving or disapproving of it).

All the respondents mention Ljubljana's *Radio Študent* and the *Mladina* weekly magazine as the key media that could be connected with new wave and punk. *Radio Študent* is mentioned in the context of a more alternative culture, whereas *Radio Slovenia*, characterised as a more conservative medium, was marked as its antipode:

There was one specific here ... in Ljubljana, there's still *Radio Študent*, which is like a students' radio, but in principle it was quickly occupied by these groups of people with a more alternative presentiment, and they initiated a policy so that, today, it's more or less exclusively alternative music, punk and all that ... that was the same there in that time, but it's just one radio station. Then there were some other, a couple of commercial stations, so more or less they did not play this music. There was *Radio Slovenia* then, in principle a relatively conservative institution by default, which should've been for all, but there were a few music editors who were quite progressive and weren't punkers, but somehow they had a feeling that it was some new music, which should be followed, so they broadcast some of the songs here and there ... for the largest part the *Pankrti* because their music's essentially quite communicative, it can be listened to, as well as some other bands.

Then there was even *Radio Študent*, which was funded by the authorities, but the authorities were more or less not interested and spent the largest amounts

of money exactly on constantly travelling to the West for new stuff to buy, for new stuff to play, and today they still have the policy to play every new record they buy from beginning to end without interruption whatsoever (Informant 2, male, 2013).

Only one respondent mentioned that he remembers one local radio station, Radio Koper, as well as Italian stations that were listened to. Of the printed media, the respondents mention *Mladina* magazine, which they consider to be the most significant “pro-alternative” medium then: ‘By far the most significant is *Mladina*, there was some quite pro-punk, pro-alternative weekly magazine, where there was also a lot about music, politics and articles’ (Informant 1, male, 2013).

The authorities’ reaction to the development of, first of all, punk in Slovenia resulted in a famous 1981 scandal,<sup>18</sup> as well as polemics in the printed media such as *Mladina* and *Problem* (therefore, they are even more significant for punk culture). According to one of the respondents, the authorities were against punk, that new kind of the cultural and music expression, as well as against the whole of the scene that was developing in that period, who considered it problematic and wanted punk exiled, who initiated a powerful campaign against it. One of the frequently used arguments was that punk was connected with Nazism, for which reason it should be sanctioned; as a result, the police were monitoring the city (Ljubljana), bringing in young people in for interviews, and closing places where punkers gathered. In that context, Božilović (2013: 75) considers that: ‘The political resistance of the artists in Slovenia was much sharper and with more extreme symbolism than in the other Yugoslav republics.’ However, given that the other respondents mentioned neither that affair nor any other reaction of the state whatsoever in the context of new wave, the analysis did not further continue in that direction.

When the availability of that kind of music via records and journeys is in question, it is possible to highlight specific features of the geographical position of Slovenia, which certainly influenced the development of the characteristic music scene: the vicinity of Italy, primarily Trieste, as well as Austria and Germany. That is particularly significant when speaking about the respondents living in coastal Slovenia due to the proximity of Italy. They describe those contacts with Italy as listening to Italian radio stations and as journeys to buy the latest records:

That came slowly in 1980. We were lucky that Trieste was pretty near, so records were obtained quite fast (Informant 3, male, 2013)

Slovenia had a few advantages since it was pretty close to the West and the stuff was coming quite quickly. I remember we travelled to Trieste in huge numbers to buy records there. The same was with a lot of people, who might’ve had deeper pockets, who were heading for London, also returning with records, and that was in the early 1980s. When my generation’s concerned, we quickly had a possibility of ordering records so that we were always ordering them; we were somehow West-oriented a lot, we travelled to

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<sup>18</sup> For more about the scandal, see Kyaw 2009: 97–8.

Germany a lot, to these squats in Berlin, Frankfurt, where we were meeting people who had record shops, we always took our records with us and had them re-recorded once we'd returned (Informant 4, male, 2013).

Well, they went, some went there, to Italy, the Italians had concerts and were quite expensive, but we went there, I know they went to *Pink Floyd*, the whole bunch of us. But I never quite liked travelling although I travelled a lot afterwards (Informant 1, male, 2013).

The selection of the countries where the respondents travelled shows that even the music movements of that time (visits to concerts and festivals) were also geographically conditioned. They rather went to Italy, Austria or Germany than, say, Belgrade, which was physically farther:

Belgrade was too far away for us. Zagreb was a possibility, but it wasn't in that time, at least if I'm talking about my generation, nothing much happened there. I think I was there once or twice; I think it was the *Disorder* one journey to Zagreb, and that's it. When we had quite a lot of concerts in Ljubljana, then there mightn't've been the need for it, either (Informant 2, male, 2013).

I never did, and I think none of my friends did, didn't really go. We used to go from the periphery to Ljubljana, that was it (Informant 4, male, 2013).

I remember a boy, not one of my friends, but my older brother's. He went to Berlin and returned both with his records and a new punk hairstyle, and he was 'wow' (laughs) to all of us, and he had that fashion. And others, I've no idea, I don't think so. Such things happened... a primary-school friend of ours who went to Nova Gorica to live there and go to high school, well near Italy, so my two friends and I, who were the closest, used to visit him, so those were some contacts with both the crowd from Nova Gorica and, of course, Italy (Informant 1, male, 2013).

Concert activities are also an indicator of the presence of some music genre. Although they did not go to concerts in the other major cities of the former Yugoslavia, the respondents were active when concerts in Slovenia and Italy are concerned. Here, it is possible to notice yet another of Slovenia's specific aspects connected with its geographical position, and it is a larger number of concerts by foreign bands than, say, in Belgrade, which was the farthest point of Yugoslavia on touring maps. It was implied that concerts in Ljubljana or, say, Zagreb would be quite visited because the audience from the whole of the then state would come to them. This is also supported by the statement of one of the respondents:

When there was a concert and any other stuff, there were hundreds of thousands of people coming, to be honest yet, concert organisation was quite firm so that when things happened, people actually came not only from throughout Slovenia, they even came from throughout Yugoslavia (Informant 2, male, 2013).

On the basis of the respondents' answers, we could conclude that neither punk nor new wave were popular in Slovenia if the media presence or the presence of that sound in the largest number of clubs were taken as a criterion. It is a general impression, however, that new wave and first of all punk nevertheless managed to exert a certain influence over a broader social community, regardless of whether it treated them positively or negatively. The authorities' reaction to the emergence of punk can be indicative of the amount of that influence given the fact that punk was simultaneously ascribed different meanings ("a Nazism-like movement", "the only possibility of expressing oneself", "a subversive movement", etc.). According to one of the respondents, punk was more than music – it was first of all a movement and, as such, was frequently the subject matter of dispute, for the most part in fanzines and certain special issues of magazines, as well as in the circles of the authorities. In Slovenia, new wave is very rarely perceived as a phenomenon which, apart from the music influence, also has a social influence, which indicates that, in that sense, punk had greater significance to young people in Slovenia. Generally, the understanding of the popularity concept amongst the respondents is based on "what was played in the media", "what was played in clubs", "how well visited concerts were", "how frequent concerts were", "what the crowd was listening to", while simultaneously it is possible to predict the extent to which individual experience influences such classifications and valuations. So, for example, my research conducted in Belgrade has shown that the interest in Yugoslav new wave is increasing, which could have been monitored based on the exhibitions dedicated to that phenomenon, the dedication of the *BELEF* City Event to new wave, and making movies about new wave. Based on that, it is possible to hypothesise that new wave may be more popular today than it was in its own time. Regarding Slovenia, according to the respondents, there are no similar aspirations towards the revitalisation of this phenomenon, which enables us to also read its importance to a broader circle of people in the time of its most significant popularity.

## Final considerations

Today, new wave in the Yugoslav rock music of the 1980s is, first of all, a cultural phenomenon. The music of that period is still listened to today, but what makes new wave and punk cultural phenomena is the meaning construction process, which has been ongoing for decades. When a forty-year-old phenomenon is analysed, it is necessary to bear in mind the subsequent semantic constructions that may be a fruit of nostalgia, unclear reminiscences, subsequent interpretations, and so on. For that reason, it is essential to bear in mind the fact that the present and the past incessantly interweave in the analysed material, which produces some quite new experiences and impressions of these phenomena. Through the story about new wave, people construct their memories of one period, which may offer insight into today's condition. One of the leading narratives of this phenomenon appearing in public and non-formal speech (in the media, personal conversation) is that new wave was "the shining light of the 1980s", "the movement that marked the 1980s", the time when Yugoslavia kept "pace with the world". Out of the determinations like these, it is actually possible to indirectly read the interpretation according to which we are not keeping pace with the world today: 'a joyful urban scene, always reputed as

one of the more qualitative ones in the territory of the Former Yugoslavia,<sup>19</sup> ‘the last big dream before the disintegration of Yugoslavia,’<sup>20</sup> ‘the best period in the domestic Yugoslav music,’<sup>21</sup> ‘great energy and engaged texts.’<sup>22</sup>

So, given the rich semantic spectrum and the avoidance of any classification whatsoever in the time of its existence, today new wave is observed as a phenomenon of not a great semantic diversity. Its significance is to a great extent mirrored in the deviation from the 1990s, the decade that has left a profound imprint on the territory of the former Yugoslavia and people’s lives. Thus, new wave is the “energy”, “an urban scene”, “the best period in Yugoslav music”, which very much refers to a conclusion that all these are the determinants not present to a great extent today. We should bear in mind the fact that the stories such as these are created by the people who were young in that time, who for that reason certainly mark that period in a positive context because they view it in the present time from a perspective of middle-aged people. The feeling of nostalgia is also connected with suchlike determinations. The respondents I interviewed in Slovenia, as well as in Serbia, who have been living in different states for a longer period, consider new wave and punk as important both in the personal sense and in the sense of constructing a segment of the collective cultural identity. In that light, music is pointed at as a significant cultural phenomenon enabling insight into a specific epoch, a concrete place, social and cultural life.

The research study of the comprehension of new wave in Slovenia has, first of all, and differently from punk, resulted in the knowledge that new wave did not influence the formation of an active local scene to a great extent. Despite the fact that punk was for the most part present in Slovenia, more precisely in Ljubljana, which is also how my Slovenian and my Belgrade respondents opine, it is interesting that there is no excessive inclination towards the glorification of those phenomena in Slovenia today, in particular not so in smaller places, which indicates the two things: first, the observation of Yugoslav new wave – after all, new wave generally differs from one environment to another; and second, new wave is something separate from punk. This was also demonstrated by the research done in Belgrade, but the observations of these phenomena necessarily went in parallel with each other there, interweaving to some extent, too, because new wave was also spoken about by those who consider themselves to be punkers. For the most part, new wave and punk were emphatically local phenomena, creating an integral part of what Stankovič (2012: 104) called the ‘Yu rock local identity;’ the geographical position of the country itself, the vicinity of Italy, Austria, Germany, and simultaneously the greater availability of records, the possibility of going to a larger number of concerts, could yet be classified into local specific features.

Although there is no pronounced aspiration in the Slovenian context towards the revitalisation of the period of the 1980s, i.e., the new wave and punk phenomena, the analysis has demonstrated that there is a pronounced feeling of locality when speaking about them. New wave and punk could be said to be perceived today as the local and global phenomena that are important in the formation of not only personal identities but

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<sup>19</sup> <https://novitalas.wordpress.com/>

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.novosti.rs/dodatni\\_sadrzaj/feljttoni.120.html?item\\_id=881](http://www.novosti.rs/dodatni_sadrzaj/feljttoni.120.html?item_id=881)

<sup>21</sup> <https://forum.krstarica.com/showthread.php/218260-Novi-talas-kod-nas/page222>

<sup>22</sup> <http://secanja.com/2012/domaci-rok-2/>

also the identities of a specific space and time, i.e., more concretely of the cultural space of the Yugoslavia of the 1980s.

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## Povzetek

Članek problematizira koncept lokalnosti skozi zaznavanje odnosa med globalnim in lokalnim na primeru novovalovske glasbene scene, ki se je razvila na začetku osemdesetih v Jugoslaviji. Izvirajoč v Londonu in New Yorku, je punk, kasneje pa je tudi novi val, spodbudil razvoj avtentične glasbene scene v Jugoslaviji. Izvajanje pesmi v lokalnem jeziku in obravnavanje lokalnih vsebin, je iz omenjenih glasbenih zvrsti pripeljalo do nastanka lokalnega glasbenega in kulturnega fenomena, kar je pravzaprav osnovna ideja članka. Teoretski okvir obravnava te ideje je sestavljen iz razumevanja novega vala kot kulturnega fenomena ter iz opazovanja poveznosti med koncepti glasbe in prostora skozi pojem glasbene scene. Lokalne lastnosti jugoslovanskega novega vala so bile do sedaj obravnavane v beograjskih okvirjih, slovenska perspektiva pa pomeni doprinos k popolnejšemu pregledu problematike. Uporabljena metoda raziskovanja je kvalitativna in temeljna poglavljenih intervjujih s sodobniki novega vala. Analiza je pokazala, da novi val lahko štejemo za lokalni glasbeni pojav, saj je v osemdesetih obstajala avtentična glasbena scena, vendar pa je glede na percepcijo anketirancev bil v tem obdobju bolj razširjen punk, ki je bil v primerjavi z novim valom pomembnejši lokalni predstavnik.

**Ključne besede:** novi val, pank, glasbena scena, lokalna identiteta, Slovenija

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