

Changes in wedding customs in Gornja Poljica in the hinterland of Split, Croatia, in the last hundred years

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Aim: To examine how wedding customs have acquired unwritten rules over time and how much they have changed in the last hundred years.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews with three respondents from Gornja Poljica (Split city hinterland) and a secondary analysis of sources with the aim of analyzing the course and customs of weddings over three generations in Gornja Poljica.

Results: As in the past, there is a wedding procedure consisting of the gathering of wedding guests, the pick-up of the bride at her home, the wedding ceremony, the celebration, and the visit of the bride's family to her new home. The new customs are a bachelorette party, a garter toss, a wedding cake and wearing a wedding dress all night. Of 28 customs from 100 years ago, nine (one-third) have disappeared, the wedding day has been changed from Monday to Saturday, the ceremony has been shortened from three days to one, the number of wedding guests has been increased, and the bachelorette party has been introduced.

Conclusion: From the narratives, it appears that the wedding ceremony is primarily a personal event, one of the most important in the life of the bride and groom, especially for the woman, for whom it represents a permanent change in family and social status. Until the 1950s, women were more passive in the role of bride than they are today. Through the process of women's emancipation, globalization and the possibility of free choice, the values and practice of marriage itself have changed.

Introduction

Poljica

Poljica is located in an area about 15 km east of the Dalmatian capital Split, from Žrnovnica to Blato on the river Cetina and Omiš and from the sea to the hinterland of the mountain Mosor (**Figure 1**). It is divided into Upper, Middle, and Lower Poljica (Croatian: Gornja, Srednja and Donja Poljica). Upper Poljica includes the villages of Gornji Dolac, Donji Dolac, Srijane and Trnbusi, Middle Poljica includes Kostanje, Zvečanje, Čišla, Gata, Dubrava, Sitno i Srinjine and Lower Poljica includes Podstrana, Jesenice, Dugi Rat and Duće.

Poljica was an administrative area under self-government of the people, which had extensive autonomy of the medieval type from the 13th century until the occupation by Napoleon's army in the early 19th century (Fortis, 2004; Marmont, 1984; Ursinus, 2021). Today, most of the inhabitants of Gornja Poljica live in Donja Poljica. The reason for this is that at the beginning of the last century, more precisely in 1914, a factory for iron alloys, lime and other raw materials was opened in Dugi Rat, the port of Poljica, and the population from Gornja Poljica moved there (Ivanišević, 2006).



Figure 1. Map of the Poljica.

Wedding customs in Poljica at the turn of the 20th century

Wedding is one of the most important determinants of the life cycle, and thus a common theme in the life of every person. The elements of the wedding ceremony are full of symbolism and therefore a relevant topic of ethnological and cultural anthropological research. Wedding customs are perhaps the most representative moment of a local community and thus one of the most important ethnological topics. Wedding customs vary regionally and locally and are often chosen by folklore communities as an opportunity to represent local, regional, and even national identity. Ethnologists, cultural anthropologists, folklorists, and

others have already engaged in the study and interpretation of certain wedding elements (Gavazzi, 1928; Alaupović-Gjeldum, 1996; Vitez, 2004; Lončar, 2009). This paper will focus on the course of the wedding and the changes in the wedding ceremony from 1954 to 2009 over three generations in Poljica (former Republic of Poljica). Ivanišević (2006) wrote extensively about wedding customs and tried to present the ideal wedding model, but in the end, he only gave a description. Each wedding is specific and subject to the preferences of the newlyweds, so it is not easy to assess to what extent it is subject to change. The history of wedding customs in Poljica is detailed in the records of Frane Ivanišević from 1906 (Ivanišević, 2006). At the beginning of the 20th century in Poljica, boys were expected to marry at 20 and girls at 17. The aim of this study was to examine how wedding customs and the concept of marriage have changed over three generations in Poljica County. The study is based on the accounts of three women from the same family in Poljica, belonging to three different generations.

Courtship

When a young man took a liking to a girl, he would look for an opportunity to meet her, whether in front of a church, in a meadow, or in a field. If the two looked at each other, it was not long before the rest of the community found out about them. Sometimes, the parents were not in favor of the proposition, but eventually they would come to terms with their children's decisions (Ivanišević, 2006).

Once the parents accepted their children's choice, the *prošnja* (marriage proposal) followed. Usually, a young man went to the *prošnja* with his father or uncle on holidays. In the 19th century, it was common for both the young man and the young woman to ask all the relatives in their family and village if they agreed with their choice. However, at the beginning of the 20th century this custom was lost. For the *prošnja*, the young man came to the girl's house with his companion. He first told her father why they had come; only then did the father ask his daughter if she wanted to accept the proposal. Throughout the conversation, as well as in answering, the girl would be shy. If the girl accepted the proposal, she would offer her hand to the young man and his father or the attendant would give her a ring, a brooch, a necklace, and money in gold. This *obilježje* (gift) meant that she accepted the *prošnja*. After the girl received the *obilježje*, the young man was free to come to the girl's house, they could spend time together in front of the church or at *dernek* (party), he could pay for her lunch or buy her an apple, but she always had to be accompanied by one of her friends. The bride's parents always held up the preparations for the wedding, even if the young man wanted to get married as soon as possible. The seasons were also considered. *Pirevi* (wedding day celebrations) usually took place in the fall. A barrel of wine was provided for the *pirevi*. People went to town to buy a fabric that could be sewn, or the bride sewed together with her friends. For the *dota* (dowry; the bride's belongings to bring to her new home), the bride prepared the following: a raincoat, a shepherd's blanket to cover herself, some ropes, a bag and a sack for the house, a sickle, an axe, and a linen cloth for the bed.

Pre-wedding customs

During the wedding, an *ugovor* (contract) would follow. It included the agreement on the *napovidanje* (announcement) of the wedding in the church and the wedding itself. It was customary for two people to go to the girl's house on a Sunday afternoon to make the *ugovor* or, as it was also called, *jabuka* (apple). They dressed ceremoniously and brought food, drinks and *jabuka* in which they put money - it was a gift for the girl. The *ugovor* specified the number of guests/wedding attendants and other details. It was important to remember the agreements well so that no one could object later if something had not been agreed upon. After the *ugovor* was finalized, the two who had come would spend the night at the girl's house. They would stay until tomorrow after lunch. They would go home and fire their rifles to let the local community know that the girl had accepted the marriage proposal.

In some villages the customs *prstenovanje* and *okretanje na oposun* were respected. On the table in the middle of the house there was a ring, a razor, a mirror, and a rosary. The father of the groom then took the girl, i.e., the bride, by the arms, turned her three times in the right direction, i.e., in the direction of the movement of the *oposun* (sun), put on the ring, made a sign, and said: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen."

Napovid (announcement) in the church took place on the first following Sunday. First the young man and the young woman came to the priest, who checked if they were related, and then he took the *napovid* of the wedding in the Sunday mass. The wedding was announced on three consecutive Sundays. When the wedding was announced, neither the young man nor the young girl wanted to go to church "because they were ashamed." Immediately after the first announcement, the young man's father invited the wedding guests to *pir*, and the girl bought the last things necessary for the wedding.

When the third *napovid* of the bride and groom was completed, and this was usually Sunday, *pir* was held the following day, Monday. In some villages, the weddings took place on Sundays after mass, but only after the people had left the church. This behavior was respected because it was feared that the people present at the mass would cast curses on the bride and groom. *Pir* and the mass with the blessing took place on Monday. Close relatives and friends were invited to the *pir* (Figure 2).

On Sunday afternoon, the *đuveglija* (groom), the *diver* (groom's brother), the *enga* (sister, sister-in-law, or first cousin of the *đuveglija* who would accompany the young bride at the wedding), and another young man who would lead the horse, got ready, took chests (Figure 3) and food, and went to the bride to get the *dota*, the things the bride would take with her to her new home. On the way, the *diver* fired from a rifle. In the house of the girl was *marenda* (brunch) and meanwhile the girl put the goods in the chest. The mother watched and counted everything carefully, and the sisters, if there were any, so that they did not get less for their own wedding. After they had eaten, they went to the groom's house with the chests, but the sisters would not give the chests out without a ransom. A few coins were given as ransom, and in return the girls gave an *ular* (decorated halter) and a *zobnica* (feed bag) for the horse. The *enga* received a *šudar*, i.e., a neckerchief as a gift. The chests would be placed on the horse, and the host would prepare food and drink for their return, because it would be a shame if they had nothing to eat on the way home. After that, they would set off for the *đuveglija*'s house.



Figure 2. Wedding in *Gornja Poljica* around 1900. Source: Vitez 2000, with permission.



Figure 3. A chest for the bride's belongings from the 20th century (property of a family from Poljica). Photo by Marijana Pavković, 2016.

Wedding duties

They returned home and fired their rifles. The neighboring women went out into the street to look at the boxes, especially the bride's clothes, which she wanted to take with her. When they got home, it was time for dinner. The church bells rang, and the wedding

guests gathered. The bride and groom sat down at the table with the family. They talked and ate, the eldest of the house took a *bukara* (a wooden wine jug) and toasted to the one chosen as *prvinac* (the one who leads the wedding procession), then to the *barjaktar* (flag bearer, the one who carries the flag), the best man, the *stari svat* (his job is to make sure everything goes well), the *diver*, the *čauš* (his job was to provide the atmosphere at the wedding) and finally the *enga*. The groom's youngest son-in-law was usually chosen to be the *barjaktar*. All wedding guests had to listen to the instructions of the *stari svat*, he was the leader of the wedding. In determining the roles at the wedding, guests were not addressed by their first names until the end of the wedding, but by the names assigned to them by the *domaćin* (host). Once those were established, the rifle was fired. The wedding guests would call the *domaćin*, and the one who would cook at the wedding would be called *lončina* or *taritava*. The groom was jokingly called *napališa* or *ogorija* (horny). The wedding guests were forbidden to enter the kitchen during the wedding, except for the *začina*, who was allowed to enter the house and see if the food was salty or not.

Wedding day

On Moday, the wedding guests dressed in the finest clothes (either their own or borrowed) and adorned themselves with flowers. They also decorated the flag with an apple and a silk scarf. When they went to pick up the bride, the *prvinac* went first, then *barjaktar*, then the *stari svat*, the best man, the *đuveglija*, the *diver*, the *enga* and the *čauš* or *buklijaš*. If there were more wedding guests, there could be two with the same duties, and all others were called *staćeli* or *staćenbaši* – regular wedding guests.

The *prvinac* wore a *peškir* (towel) and a hat decorated with flowers, a *kanparan* (heavy coat), pants decorated with a *brus* (a red silk thread) and a *čoja* (woolen scarf), shoes on the feet, a shirt, a silk *krožet* (vest) with silver buttons, a red belt and over the shoulder two silk scarves, then a large *bilospac* (a kind of long knife), two rifles and an *arbija* (ramrod - a rod used to load the rifle). Over the weapon was a white scarf with a lace, under the armpit he wore a *kamiš* (tobacco pipe), a whistle and a *lumbrel* (umbrella). The *barjaktar* was dressed in the same way, only he was still carrying the flag. The other wedding guests were dressed similarly. The *čauš* carried a *ćulum* (a kind of tool) over his shoulder, on which he carried a bag and a *buraća* (a kind of wine glass). The *ćulum* was sharpened at one end like a *mašklin* (mattock), while at the other end it had a *pala* (the Turkish name for a short sword) like a hammer on a meter-long handle. The bride wore blue *jačerma* (a kind of dress below the knee, decorated with silk), a printed apron, *postoline* (shoes), a *krožet* (vest) made of silk with *pucin* (buttons), on her head a headdress known locally as *obluk* and a *tulana* hat. On the *obluk* were silver pins, around her neck a *sindir* (a necklace) and a cross around her neck. On her hands she wore her wedding ring with other rings. On her left hand a *rušnica* (a handbag) and a *lumbrel*. The *enga* wore black clothes, a hat and a silk scarf, a cross around her neck and a purse in her hand.

So, the wedding guests went to the girl's house, singing and shooting from a rifle. On the way, the villagers offered them drinks, a practice called *buklija*. At this time the bride got ready, put on a skirt, put on an ornate apron, then a *tkanica* (a narrow belt) around her waist and a shawl and a crown or wreath of flowers on her head. The bride was happy and

sad at the same time. It was hard for her to leave her parents and friends, but she wanted to get married, it was her day.

The *domaćin* and the other guests who had gathered in the bride's house welcomed the wedding guests. The first to take the floor was the *prvinac*, who said that he had heard that there was a treasure for which they were going to search. So, a woman was taken out of the house and asked if she was the treasure they were looking for. They answered that she was not. This they repeated three or four times until the real bride came out. Then they fired from a rifle and drank. When the wedding guests arrived, the *enga* was given the task of entering the house and seeing if the bride needed anything else. After the bride was taken out of the house and the wedding guests had something to drink, they went to the church. On the way to the church, they sang and shot from a rifle.

The priest welcomed them to the church, and they were married with the best man and the *diver* as witnesses. The bride shyly answered the priest's questions. The priest also gave a sermon during the Mass in honor of the newlyweds and gave them a blessing for their life together. There were different beliefs related to the wedding. The bride sometimes wore a garment backwards so that she would not be cursed. Some kept blessed salts in a cloth to protect them from curses. There was also a belief that whoever blew out the candle first would die first. One of the beliefs was that it is unfortunate to go back the same way you came.

After the mass, the newlyweds gave gifts to the priest and invited him to a festive lunch. If the priest accepted the invitation, it would be a great honor for this household. On the way home there was singing and shooting from rifles, and the bride distributed cakes and apples to relatives and friends in front of the church. The *enga* threw nuts, almonds, and figs to the children. When the wedding guests arrived at the bride's house, the *prvinac* and the *barjaktar* blocked the entrance to the house and demanded a ransom that the host had to give them. The *prvinac* received a *terluke* (handmade woolen socks) and the *barjaktar* received a *šudar* (scarf) for the flag. The *diver* received a live chicken. When the wedding guests entered the house, they prayed first and then lunch was served (pasta, meat, sauerkraut, liver, roast, mutton, or lamb). When a new course was brought, the *stari svat* gave the order to fire the rifle. The *diver* had to take good care of the bride so that her family members would not take her away from him, which would mean disgrace. The last course of the meal was roasted meat.

It was customary to give the *diver* the cutlery with which the bride would eat in her new home. It was also customary to place a *mutap* (a goat hair rug) on the doorstep of the house, and the bride would throw an apple over the house and kneel to ask forgiveness of her household. Then it was time to leave. The *diver* led the bride, and the best man and groom were the last to arrange with the host when the *pohodi* would take place. At the parting, the bride's mother gave her new son-in-law a shirt, and he gave her money. The guests sang, drank, and shot from rifles along the way. The wedding guests who stayed at the bride's household and those who accompanied the groom shot from a rifle. They did not want to be indebted to each other. When they arrived in front of the groom's house, they fired again. The groom's parents were waiting for them at the entrance, and they gave the young bride a kiss.

Then the bride was given a small boy, whom she had to turn over three times. Such behavior related to the belief that she would also have a male child. The *prvinac* and the *barjaktar* again blocked the way of the wedding guests, as they did in the bride's house, until they received a ransom. When they entered the house, the host first blessed all the guests and spoke forgiveness to them. The *enga* threw figs, walnuts, and almonds to the children. After that, she took the bride to where she had previously taken her chests to change. The *diver* gave the host the cutlery with which the bride was to eat. If he did not, he could be told that there was nothing to eat for him or for her, because they had nothing to eat with. All through the celebration there was shooting, singing, and eating. When night fell, all the guests stayed at the groom's house, because it was customary to celebrate for three days.

The day after the wedding

On the morning after the wedding, the bride, the *enga*, the *čauš* and the *diver* went to fetch water with which the guests were to wash their faces. The bride brought bread, meat, figs, and money, which she left at the water's edge so that the first person to arrive after her would find a gift. A shot from a rifle announced that the bride had brought the water when she returned to the house.

When the guests woke up, they first had a drink and then washed their faces with the water brought by the bride. The bride held soap and a towel in her hands, which the guests and neighbors used to wash and dry themselves. While they were washing, they gave the bride money, and she gave them a *šudarić* (a handkerchief) in return. The *stari svat* washed first, followed by the other guests. The *diver* collected the money, which he then gave to the bride.

After washing, they ate and drank. If the weather was nice, they danced the *kolo* (a traditional dance), shot from a rifle and the like. In bad weather, they stayed at the table and talked, smoked, etc.

The priest and the teacher were invited to the celebration, and sometimes they accepted the invitation, but most of the time they declined it. Eating and drinking was the same as the day before. On this day (Tuesday), the wedding guests went to bed earlier.

The second day after the wedding

On Wednesday, accompanied by *enga*, the bride again brought the water for washing. The washing ritual was the same as the day before. The guests again gave money to the bride, but she gave nothing back. After lunch, the guests would leave and the bride would give them shirts, *terluke* and socks. The guests would give her money in return. From that moment on, the wedding guests were addressed by their first names. The guests would go home and shoot a rifle.

The first Sunday after the wedding

On the first Sunday after the wedding, the wedding guests gathered again at the groom's house to accompany the young bride to mass. The young bride wore the same clothes she had worn at the wedding. Before the mass, the guests dined at the groom's house. In the church, the young bride would stand next to *enga*. On that day, the groom would

not go to church. On this day, the bride would distribute the *lemozina* (alms) to relatives, bridesmaids and friends who had helped her make the wedding clothes. The *diver* gave the *lemozina* to the priest for the souls of the deceased and for the Blessed Sacrament. After the mass, the priest counted the amount of *lemozina* that the bride had given and said from the altar how much the amount was. After that, the young bride, accompanied by her mother-in-law and *enga*, went to the priest, kissed his hand, and received instructions from him on how to be a good Christian. Then she gave him *terluke*, and on leaving the church she gave cakes to her friends. Once home, the bride changed her clothes and ate. During the meal, the guests again used the names that referred to their roles at the wedding. When the guests left, the young bride gave them gifts in the same way she had on Wednesday, as well as the guests. This is how the celebration ended in Gornja Poljica.

On the same day that the bride was escorted to church, her brother and mother came to her home; this was called *pohodi* or *po'odani*. The bride kissed her mother and brother. They gave the family food and drink. Dinner was served for the new friends. After dinner, the bride accompanied them to their house with the *diver*. But before they left, the host would put food and drink in the bag that was brought to him. The bride would give socks to her brother. She would take cakes, figs and walnuts and give them away to relatives, friends, or neighbors. On the way to the bride's house, shots were fired from a rifle. When the bride arrived at her birthplace, she kissed her father and other family members and gave them cakes and apples, while the children got nuts and figs.

The arrival of the bride to her house was called *odiva* (separation). Everyone was glad to see the bride who had parted from them eight days ago. The neighbors asked her how she was doing in her new home, and she told them that she was doing well. Even when things were not satisfactory, she could secretly tell that to her mother, who advised her to bear everything patiently. The bride stayed in the house with *diver* until noon the next day. When they returned, her parents gave them something to eat and drink, and she gave the gift to her father-in-law when she got home.

Restricted forms of wedding

There were restricted forms of marriage that were not looked upon favorably. If the girl was pregnant during the wedding or had already given birth, there was no celebration, only eating together. Relatives and friends would be unhappy, she would be criticized, and the local community would gossip about her. When a widow married, she wore the same clothes as the first time, that is, the same clothes in which she had married her deceased husband. The *pir* took place in the young groom's household. There was no rejoicing at such weddings either. Such cases were a real rarity. It was more likely that a widower would remarry than a widow, and there was no great celebration when a widow married a widower, only lunch. Such weddings used to be a mockery in the village. Therefore, they would usually get married in the town so as not to become a laughingstock in the village.

For a detailed list of specific expressions related to wedding customs in the Dalmatian hinterland, see [Appendix 1](#).

Methods

The main research question of this study was to determine how the concept and course of marriage has changed in the hinterland of Split, Croatia, in the last hundred years. Since the purpose of this study was to get detailed information on an individual's perspective, feelings, experiences and the meaning about their wedding and marriage, we conducted an ethnographic in-depth interview with representatives of three generations of a family from Gornja Poljica. An in-depth interview is a qualitative research data collection method that uses a discovery-oriented approach to get deeper information, knowledge and the derived meaning about a particular topic or issue. This information usually concerns personal matters, such as values, decisions, ideology, lived experience, cultural knowledge, or perspective. Since researchers using this approach invest a significant amount of time with each participant employing a conversational format, in-depth interviewing is used to conduct detailed interviews with a small number of participants, usually called key informants (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020; Johnson & Rowlands, 2012). The semi-structured interview consisted of fourteen main questions (Appendix 2) with additional questions depending on how the conversation progressed.

The interviews were based on open-ended questions and were conducted separately with the grandmother, mother, and granddaughter. All three interviews were recorded and later transcribed and analyzed by author. In analyzing the material, individual parts of the interview were reproduced through quotations. The participants talked about their attitudes toward economic, political, and local conditions, as well as their views on the elements of the wedding ceremony. They also talked about the marriage itself, a relationship that brings about permanent change in family and social status in a woman's life.

Participants

Three key informants representing three generations of a family from Gornja Poljica were interviewed to reveal the preparations, process, and changes in the wedding ceremony in the Poljica region from the mid-20th century to the present day. Mare Bijelić (mother-in-law and grandmother) was born in 1929. She married in 1954 and lived in Gornji Dolac until her death in July 2019. Danka Bijelić (daughter-in-law and mother) was born in 1965 and married in 1985, currently living in Omiš. The third participant, Marija Skejo (daughter and granddaughter), was born in 1985 and married in 2009. She currently lives in Dugi Rat.

The research was conducted in September 2016, duration of each interview was about 90 minutes, and the location of the interview varied depending on where the participants lived: the interview with Mare Bijelić was conducted in Gornji Dolac, with Danka Bijelić in Omiš, and with Marija Skejo in Dugi Rat.

The participants gave their written consent to the publication of their statements, photos, and names. However, all names were pseudonymised since many ethical codes outline the importance of anonymity and confidentiality (Given, 2008). In-depth interviews with key informants were performed after obtaining approval from the Ethics Committee of the University of Zadar.

A comparison between the historical records and the three interviews

In-depth interviews rarely constitute the sole data source in research since this technique has limitations due to the lack of generalizability. This technique is commonly used in conjunction with other research data collection methods as one of the components in multi-method research designs (Johnson & Rowlands, 2012; Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). For that reason, in addition to the life stories of women from three generations of the same family, data from the monograph by Don Frane Ivanišević (2006) were used to provide insight into wedding customs at the beginning of the 20th century and to analyze the changes in wedding customs in the second half of the 20th century, i.e., the period when the grandmother and mother married. Overall, wedding customs were analyzed by comparing four points in time: Ivanišević (2006), the first generation (mother-in-law and grandmother, 1954), the second generation (daughter-in-law and mother, 1985), and the third generation (daughter and granddaughter, 2009).

Results

Three married women from the Poljica region, grandmother, mother, and granddaughter, were interviewed for research purposes. The first participant, Mare (grandmother), had no brother, her father was ill, and she did various jobs to save some money. After her marriage, her husband came to live in her family home. She recalls:

“My late father was sick, I had no brother, but when I was younger, I went to Naklice (village) to pick sour cherries and wild cherries and to harvest grass, and with the money I collected I bought clothes. Here is my *dota*.”

Danka (mother) lived in a village, attended high school in Omiš, where she met her husband. During her school years in Omiš she lived with her relatives. After high school she got a job in the textile factory Galeb. After two years of relationship, they got married. Her father was employed, and her mother was a housewife and worked in the fields. After the wedding, she lived with her husband in an apartment.

Marija (granddaughter) grew up in Dugi Rat and Omiš, attended high school, and after graduation found a job and decided to get married because she had been with her boyfriend for six years. She met her boyfriend through a mutual friend. Before they built their own house, they were tenants.

Before the wedding

All three participants married when they were older than the age of 20, and if this data is compared with the study conducted by Ivanišević (2006), we see that the age at which girls marry had changed compared to the beginning of the last century when it was common for girls to marry at the age of seventeen.

„The ideal” age for getting married

All three participants married at a similar age. The oldest participant from the family married at an older age compared to the younger participants. The age of marriage in this

family consisting of three generations depended on finding a soul mate and the desire to start a family. Mare (grandmother) was 25 when she married. When she found the right man, she decided to marry him. Danka (mother) believes that she got married very young, but the marriage took place because she found love:

“I chose my husband myself; I fell in love very young, at the age of 18. I got married and had a child at the age of 20.”

Marija (granddaughter) got married at the age of 24. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Croatia, the average age of marriage for girls was 26.8 years and for boys 29.7 years ([Women and men in Croatia, 2010](#)). From this perspective, Marija married at a younger age than the average age of girls getting married.

Parental consent

All three participants chose their partners themselves, as the following statements show:

“If I had listened to my parents, I would not have married him. And I did not listen to them. You know, my late mother did not like the Bijelić family very much” (Mare, grandmother).

“I chose my husband myself” (Danka, mother).

“As for my choice of husband, no one had any influence on that” (Marija, granddaughter).

Pre-wedding customs

Pre-wedding customs have also changed over time, as Mare (grandmother) said: “My preparations were bad because I had nothing.” She said this about the agreement on the wedding ceremony: “They did that. And they gave the names to determine everyone’s roles.” About the customs before the wedding Danka (mother) said:

“A bachelorette party did not take place at that time, there was something like preparations for a celebration. Since the celebration was not... it was not held in one place, but in the village, in a house in the village. Partly at my place, partly at the groom’s place.”

The arrangements for the celebration included an agreement on the number of guests, who would be invited, what food and drink would be served at the celebration, what the payment would be, where they would live after the wedding, and the like. Marija (granddaughter), the third participant, reduces the wedding preparations to a bachelorette party and talks about the customs before the wedding:

“Of the customs before the wedding, I only had a bachelorette party a few days before the wedding. I organized a bachelorette party for my friends to celebrate my future status.”

Mare (grandmother) said that her preparations for the wedding were extremely modest because she lived in poverty and had almost nothing, so she could not organize a special wedding. This is what she said about she said about the *dota*:

“My *dota* did not bring anything except the gifts for him, for his mother, for the *divers* and a *conistra* (basket) from me, a *conistra* with clothes, nothing else because we did not plan to live there, so we did not bring any clothes.”

Danka (mother) said:

“The *dota* was brought on Thursdays. I took my personal things, bedding, let us say, and I cannot remember what else. The most basic things. I think. What I could take with me at that time. That’s clothes, bedding, my personal things, dishes, the wedding gifts I got, I do not know what else, a lot of things. Most of the personal belongings and the gifts I received for the celebration.”

Marija (granddaughter) said:

“I did not have a *dota* and nothing was taken because for me personally, it’s the worst custom I have ever heard of. The *dota* is the worst custom imaginable for me because of the nosy and unimportant people, their views and attitudes.”

The wedding

About the wedding clothes, Mare (grandmother) said:

“I borrowed it from someone else and that’s why I hated it. Who would wear something like that around their arms, God forbid, I could not!”

She describes her wedding dress as follows: “One from an old woman. A *krožet*, a *jačerma*, the *jačerma* was for the wedding, I never wore it later.”

Danka, (mother) said:

“I got up in the morning, I got up, I went to Omiš to get my hair done, I got my hair done, I put on makeup, I came home, I put on my wedding dress, let us say, although it was not a wedding dress, it was a formal dress, more than a little shorter” (Figure 4).

Marija (granddaughter) said:

“The preparations for the wedding began with us getting up together in the morning, having breakfast and going to confession. After that, we separated. I went to the hairdresser. When my hair was ready, I headed to the village. There, a makeup artist was waiting for me to make me beautiful for the day. Afterwards, I took pictures with my girlfriends.”

She recounts: “I wore a white wedding dress”. She also later said:

“My big wish was to get married in a white wedding dress because this color is a symbol of purity and innocence for me personally. And it was very popular to get married in a white wedding dress” (Figure 5).



Figure 4. Wedding attire of the newlyweds at the wedding of Danka Bijelić in 1985. Source: The private album of Danka Bijelić, with permission.



Figure 5. Wedding attire of the newlyweds at the wedding of Marija Skejo in 2009. Source: The private album of Marija Skejo, with permission.

The wedding ceremony

In the middle of the 20th century, when Mare (grandmother) got married, the guests gathered at the groom's family home on the first day of the wedding celebration. The next day they came to the bride's house to pick up the bride so that the bride and groom could go to the wedding ceremony. Mare got married in the church in front of a priest. She said:

“They gathered at my husband's house, they came the next day around 10 o'clock and we were married by the late Don Petar Tadinac in St. Roch (a parish church in Gornji Dolac).”

Danka (mother) said that the wedding guests she invited gathered at her parents' house, while Marija (granddaughter) said:

“My wedding guests gathered at my father's house in the village, and my husband's guests gathered at his family house.”

Both the wedding day and the duration of the wedding ceremony have changed a lot in the last 62 years. Mare (grandmother), who was married in 1954, said:

“It was Saturday when we got married. They came here about 10 o'clock on Saturday, and we went to the wedding ceremony, then we ate at our house until it got dark, and after dark we went there (to my husband's). We were there, and they told me to stay for eight days, but I could not. I could not stay more than three days. There was a woman from Split there, and she said I would not stay there, I would go with her to her house. I told her I would not stay. You do not hear the church bells ringing, you do not hear the bells at noon, you do not hear anything. And on the third day I went home.”

Her leaving the wedding was justified by her husband's aunt, who Mare loved very much, and the husband's parents and the other family members accepted it. According to Mare, therefore she did not have any problems with her husband's family for leaving the wedding.

Danka (mother) said: “It was Sunday. First in Omiš and later in Trnbusi”, while Marija (granddaughter) said: “I got married on Saturday in Gornji Dolac, where I come from, because I had a quarrel with the priest in the place where I lived.”

Number of guests at the wedding

From the interview, we can conclude that the reason for changing the duration of the wedding is that the wedding guests are mostly people with full time jobs who do not have time to be at someone else’s wedding for three days. We can assume that in the beginning and middle of the century, rural people were looking for any excuse to take a break from the agricultural life, so weddings lasted longer.

Mare (grandmother) said that only 20 guests attended her wedding. Danka (mother) said: “There were maybe 150 people.” Marija (granddaughter) said: “There were about 200 guests.”

Lately, in the Poljica region, besides parents, groomsmen, bridesmaids and relatives of the bride and groom, close and even distant friends are invited to the wedding, as well as colleagues and people with whom the future couple often meet in everyday life. On the other hand, when Mare (grandmother) got married, the family was present at the wedding, and close relatives of the bride and groom were among the wedding guests.

Wedding officials

Wedding duties are a tradition of Croatian weddings, and they appear in these three generations at wedding ceremonies in the Poljica region. Mare (grandmother) said that the wedding officials at her wedding included the *barjaktar*, the *prvinac*, the *stari svat*, and the bridesmaid, about whom she said: “The bridesmaid was mine, but she was his (the husband’s) aunt from Split.” Danka (mother) said:

“We had a car that drove the newlyweds, the first in the procession of cars. It was the Croatian flag, but with a star. It did not have the checkerboard pattern then. Those were the times. And there was *barjaktar*. The flag was decorated with socks, a *šugaman*, a shirt and a chicken on the top of the flag.”

Marija (granddaughter) said:

“We did not have a classic wedding procession. We only had *barjaktar* who carried the flag. The flag was decorated and the *barjaktar* led the wedding party.”

The number and titles of wedding officials depend on the place where the wedding is held, the preferences of the bride and groom, and the style of wedding ceremony. Nowadays, wedding duties are combined so that one person often holds several roles, and unlike the weddings of Mare and Danka, where various roles were divided. At Marija’s wedding only the best man and the bridesmaid had distinctive roles, whereas the *barjaktar* was also considered as the *prvinac*, the *čauš* and the *stari svat*.

Bringing out a false bride

The custom of bringing a false bride is also characteristic of the Poljica region and Mare (grandmother) said:

“That was when they arrived. Then our people stopped here, they did not want to let us pass. Then they questioned each other and stalled us. Then the *prvinac* said: “Stop and start bringing out the women”, and then they brought them out, and there were a dozen women in front of me.”

Danka (mother) said:

“They brought out a false bride. In front of me were two, three of my friends or relatives. Let us say the relatives went out, after them I went out, and so it was the traditional act to bring out a false bride and pay. I do not know exactly how much it was. The currency at that time was the dinar. I do not even know how many dinars it was.”

Marija (granddaughter) said: “We did not have a false bride or the act of stealing shoes.”

The custom of bringing a false bride in the Poljica area has survived to this day, but unlike in the past, when it was common, today it depends on the wedding organization of the bride and groom and their preferences. For example, Marija, who got married in 2009, did not have the custom of bringing a false bride to the wedding ceremony, nor did she have the theft of the shoe, which is also an old custom at wedding ceremonies in this area (Ivanišević 2006). The reason for this, as she explains:

“All these customs, such as throwing an apple, stealing a shoe, kissing male children, false brides and the like, are contrary to my personality. I am not a person for whom such things are important on this special day.”

In front of the church

On the subject of leaving the church, Mare (grandmother) said: “The *prvinac* went first, then the *barjaktar*, then the *stari svat*, and then the others.” In her statement, Mare does not mention the custom of throwing rose petals, rice, or sweets, while Danka (mother) said:

“Then we went out in front of the church. Back then it was customary here for the bride to throw a piece of candy. I had our crocheted bag, a bag common for the Poljica area, full of candies and sweets, and I threw them to the wedding guests, the candies and sweets.”

Village musicians have traditionally been of great importance in the performance of wedding ceremonies. This is confirmed by the words of Danka (who talks about the music, songs and dancing after the wedding):

“There was singing and music in front of the church, for those who wanted to dance a little. I am telling you, when I came out of the church, I threw myself out of the bag” (Figure 6).

When at the wedding of Marija (granddaughter) the groom and his wedding guests came to pick up the bride at her house, with them came the accordion player they had hired, who played the appropriate songs, and immediately boosted the atmosphere. He was the main entertainer at the ceremony itself. After the wedding ceremony, he waited outside the church, and when the newlyweds came out, he sang, and the guests danced with the newlyweds. Also, at the venue where *pir* was held, the newlyweds arranged a band in advance, which played the whole evening only for the newlyweds and their guests. The wedding ceremony consisted of a series of meals, etc., which lasted until the early hours of the morning. The atmosphere was very cheerful and most of the guests danced to every song the band played.



Figure 6. A traditional bag from the Poljica area from the wedding of Danka Bijelić, 1985. Photo by Marijana Pavković, 28 September 2016.

Seating arrangement

After the wedding of Mare (grandmother), the wedding guests went to the groom's house. After Danka's (mother) wedding, the wedding guests went to her home, and her husband's wedding guests went to his home for the actual celebration. The seating plan was followed at the celebration. Mare (grandmother) said:

“I did not sit next to him (my husband), I sat next to my sister-in-law and my relative, the one from Split, and she said she would not sit with anyone but me, and then I was with them as long as I could.”

Danka (mother), who did not sit next to her husband at the wedding ceremony, said:

“Yes, next to the witnesses. We both had male best men. I also had a male best man, and so did her husband.”

Marija (granddaughter), whose wedding celebration was held in a wedding venue, said:

“At the wedding itself, I sat with my husband and the best man, the bridesmaid, at a separate table reserved for the bride and groom.”

“Oj, jabuko rumena!” (“Oh, my ruddy apple”)

Mare (grandmother) said that after arriving at the groom’s house, she did not throw an apple over the house, but sweets from a traditional Poljica bag, which Danka (mother) mentions as a custom that took place after leaving the church. She also does not mention being greeted by male children. In her speech, Danka mentioned the custom of throwing an apple over the roof of the house she entered after the wedding and kissing male children, confirming the tradition of Croatian wedding customs related to the beauty, health, and fertility of a newly married couple, for whom people wish the largest possible family and male children:

“The bride must ask her parents to forgive her before she leaves home. If she has offended anyone, they are to forgive her. Those were the customs, and then when I came to my mother-in-law’s house, I had to do another custom before I entered her house, I had to throw an apple over the house, two apples, and then there would be a little child waiting for me there, let us say little Tonči and Ivica, and then I had to kiss them and then I entered the house. Those were the customs.”

Marija (granddaughter) did not perform these customs, so it is difficult to determine whether they have survived to the present day. She said about the custom of throwing an apple:

“As for throwing an apple, I could not have done it because we were tenants.”

It can be assumed that this is a custom practiced in Poljica at different times and depending on where the young couple lives. It can also be assumed that such an act was performed when weddings were held in houses, and today, since they are held in restaurants, its use is not practical.

Food and drinks at the wedding

According to Ivanišević (2006), food played a major role at weddings. There was a lot of eating and drinking, several times a day. Dried ham, cheese, pasta, meat and sauerkraut were eaten, and a roast or lamb was served as the last course. Vitez (2000) writes that almost everywhere the number, type, and order of dishes for a wedding celebration are traditionally prescribed; the serving of some dishes marks a specific part of the wedding process and may be accompanied by an appropriate act, song or speech. Mare (grandmother) talks about the food at the wedding:

“First there was dried ham, cheese, dried ham. And then when we came back from the wedding, there was food and soup and boiled meat and dried ham and all that. Also, there was a cook, we did not cook, we had a cook from Putišić. He was an experienced cook and he cooked at many celebrations. Also, he cooked and portioned everything.”

When asked if they had had a wedding cake, Mare replied: “Yes, we did. Not just one, there were several.” When asked if her husband and she had cut the cake together, Mare replied: “We did”; “We cut one”. Danka (mother) said of her wedding reception menu:

“Traditional things; dried ham, cheese. Let us say there was no salad Olivier at that time. There was *soparnik* (a cake with a filling of Swiss chard). There was soup, boiled meat, roasted, breaded meat, salads, cakes, pastries, I mean...”

About the wedding cake she said:

“We had a wedding cake. A big cake. A three-tiered one. I do not know either. Basically, it was a brittle cake. At the bottom it’s a regular cake, and then the top three pieces were made from croquant. We cut them together” (Figure 7).

Marija (granddaughter) said:

“We ate dried ham, cheese, salad Olivier, soparnik, octopus risotto or risotto, roasted meat; we drank wine, juices, water and alcohol. We had a croquant multi-tiered wedding cake in the shape of a lighthouse, which I cut together with my husband.”



Figure 7. The wedding cake from Danka Bijelić’s wedding 1985. Source: Danka Bijelić’s private album, with permission.

Stealing the shoe, throwing the bouquet and the garter toss

In the tradition of the Poljica region, the best man was given a special task during the wedding ceremony: he had to watch over the bride and pay a ransom if the bride’s shoe was stolen. About the theft of the shoe, Mare (grandmother) said:

“They tried, but the late *diver* Jozo was near me. He saw that they were trying to steal it and jumped. After they tried, he was watching more closely, and then they stopped.”

Danka (mother) said:

“Yes, Damir took my shoe. From aunt Luca and from Darko and Matilda, and then the best man had to give some money, and that was the traditional custom. Yes, Damir gave the shoe back later, and the best man gave the money. Yes, there was the act of stealing the shoe.”

Another custom associated with wedding ceremonies is the throwing of the bridal bouquet and garter. Mare (grandmother) said that she threw the bridal bouquet at her wedding ceremony, and Danka (mother) said that she did not throw the bouquet and that there was no garter toss. She could give her bridal bouquet to whomever she wanted:

“No, that was a custom, there was no throwing of bridal bouquet, nor was there a garter. I could give my bridal bouquet to whomever I wanted. And I gave it to our Gordana, our cousin Gordana.”

Marija (granddaughter) said that she threw the bridal bouquet, and her husband threw the garter:

“As for the customs at the wedding, there was no false bride and no shoe theft. I only threw the bridal bouquet, and he threw the garter.”

Wedding gifts

It is also customary to give gifts to the bride and groom at the wedding ceremony itself. About receiving gifts from their guests, Mare (grandmother) said:

“And the wedding guests, when everything was over, gave each newlywed two pairs of socks, then they threw money on the table. The women got *šudar* and all kinds of other clothes, and that was it.”

Danka (mother) said: “In those days you did not get money as a gift, you got a food service as a gift, dishes, bedding, a blanket, shawls, quilts and things like that.” Marija (granddaughter) said: “Guests and family mostly gave us money and we gave them symbolic thank-you cards” (Figure 8).

“I am a wife now!”

About the practice of changing clothes at the wedding ceremony, Mare (grandmother) said:

“I changed my clothes immediately. I could not stand it. They wanted me to stay there for a week, but I could not do that. And my husband’s aunt from Split was there, and she said: ‘The devil take you, she will not stay here for eight days.’ I would have gone crazy. She justified my actions, you know... She went with me to the Mrčelić household (her birthplace). I went with her and did not come back.”

Danka (mother) said:

“Sometime after midnight I went into the room, took off the dress I was wearing and put on another dress, since I was already six months pregnant, I put on a wide red dress. I remember it had little ruffles. It was a beautiful dress, let us say, for that time.”

Marija (granddaughter) said: “I did not change my clothes when I got married.”

After the wedding

About post-wedding customs, Mare (grandmother) is saying that they went to lunch to the groom’s house: “The *divers* came, and the mother-in-law came here, and they were here all day.” Danka (mother) is saying: “There was lunch. My parents came over after a week, and after the next week we went to see my parents, to my mother-in-law and father-in-law.” Marija (granddaughter) is saying: “The next day we did not have a post-wedding lunch with his or my family or any other post-wedding customs”.

Changes in wedding customs from the beginning to the end of the 20th century are summarized in Table 1.

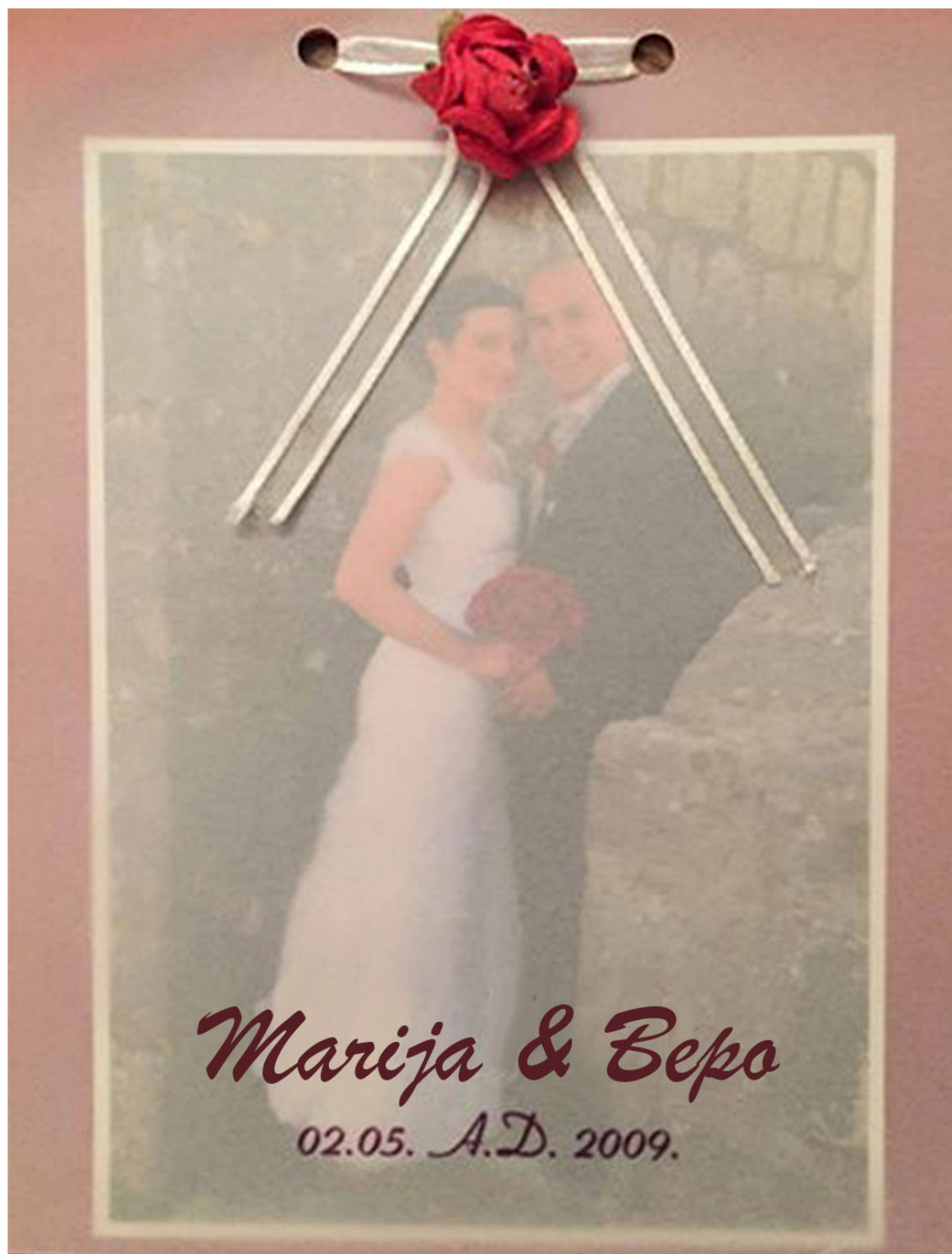


Figure 8. The thank-you card from Marija Skejo's wedding, 2009 (The image has been altered to protect the identity of the participants). Source: Marija Skejo's private album, with permission.

Table 1. Comparison of wedding customs, traditions and views on marriage in Poljica (Southern Croatia) from the beginning to the end of the 20th century (Ivanišević, 2006) and in three generations of women in a typical family

Tradition, custom, view	Changes in customs, traditions, and views over time			
	1906 (Ivanišević, 2006)	The first generation (grandmother, 1954)	The second generation (mother, 1985)	The third generation (granddaughter, 2009)
Marrying age	17	25	20	24
Parental consent	yes	no	yes	yes
Wedding day	Monday	Saturday	Sunday	Saturday
<i>Napovidanje</i> (Wedding announcement)	yes	yes	yes	yes
<i>Ugovor</i> (contract)	yes	yes	yes	no
Carrying the <i>dota</i>	yes	no	yes	no
Bachelorette party	no	no	no	yes
Wedding duties	yes	yes	yes	yes
Wedding attire	yes	yes	yes	yes
Hair and makeup	yes	yes	yes	yes
Married in church	yes	yes	yes	yes
Gathering at the groom's house	yes	yes	yes (but her guests gathered at her house)	yes (but her guests gathered at her house)
The duration of the wedding ceremony	minimum three days	eight days	one day	one day
Number of guests	Depending on the socioeconomic status	20	150	200
Bringing out a fake bride	yes	yes	yes	no
Throwing walnuts, figs, almonds in front of the church	yes	no	yes (candy)	no
Dancing in front of the church	yes	no	yes	yes
The bride sitting next to the <i>enga</i> and the <i>diver</i>	yes	no	no	no
Throwing an apple	yes	no	yes	no
Kissing a male child	yes	yes	yes	no
Meal courses at dinner	yes	yes	yes	yes
Wedding cake	no	yes	yes	yes
Throwing the bou-quet	no	yes	no (it was given to a relative)	yes
Garter toss	no	no	no	yes
The act of stealing the shoe	no	no (but they tried to steal it)	yes	no
Donation	yes	yes	yes	yes
Changing clothes at the wedding	no	yes	yes	no
Gathering at the groom's house on Sunday after the wedding	yes	no	no	no
<i>Pohodi</i> or <i>po'odani</i> *	yes	no	no	no

*The first arrival of the bride's mother and her brother in her new home.

Discussion

The stories of three women from one family provided an opportunity to analyze the gradual change of customs and the course of the wedding ceremony, its adaptation and transformation to contemporary social changes, considering local influences and social and economic circumstances. Ivanišević's description (Ivanišević, 2006) enabled comparison with wedding customs from the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century.

The men who were approached were not open to this type of research, they all claimed that this type of topic was exclusively "female", therefore the qualitative study was conducted with female participants. Qualitative methods are suitable for this research topic because the reality of women's lives in rural areas can hardly be expressed by statistical means (Šikić-Mičanović, 2012).

From the middle of the 20th century until today, Croatian women could choose their partner without the involvement of parents and/or relatives. According to the original report by Ivanišević from 1906, this was not the case in the past, i.e., the boy and the girl had to obtain the consent of their parents to marry. In the 19th century (before the engagement) they needed the consent not only of parents, but also of relatives up to nine generations (Ivanišević, 2006).

It appears that girls were allowed to think as independent persons and make their own decisions (at least on some issues) as early as the 1950s. The reasons for this can be found in schooling and education. Although the first participant (Mare, grandmother) completed only a few grades of elementary school, this was a significant advance over the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when women were mostly illiterate. We can also look for arguments for this change in the cohabitation of newlyweds. At the end of the 19th century, almost everyone lived together in large families where it was important for the whole family to accept the future daughter-in-law or son-in-law. Today, newlyweds no longer live in a community, but independently, so it is not as important for the whole family to accept him or her. The oldest participant Mare (grandmother) married her husband despite her mother's opposition, but it is also interesting to note that he moved into the house with her. The reason was that she had no brothers and needed a male hand in the house. However, such situations were not the rule, but the exception.

From the reports of participants, it appears that the pre-wedding customs changed in the period between 1985 and 2009. When Mare (grandmother) and Danka (mother) were getting married, the organization of the wedding itself and the *dota* were among the usual tasks. Although Mare (grandmother) did not bring the *dota* to her husband because they intended to live in her house, this practice existed at that time. At the wedding of Dara (grandmother) and Danka (mother), the giving of the *dota* was public. In Marija's (granddaughter) time, organizing a wedding meant only organizing the bachelorette party, and she did not consider bring the *dota* to be necessary. She even showed contempt for this custom. The custom of bringing *dota* was no longer publicly displayed but hidden from public view. The reasons for this are not known, but it can be assumed that in the last century it was important for girls to show what they had, and their parents prepared for their

marriage all their lives. The desire to marry was instilled in children at an early age, and this included preparing dowries and *dota*, learning certain trades, emphasizing the value of marriage, and more. Today, girls are more independent, so their parents do not have to prepare the *dota*.

On the other hand, the bachelorette party became an integral part of the pre-wedding festivities. It seems that globalization and the influence of Western culture have significantly changed the local tradition. Today, most brides in Croatia hold bachelorette parties just like their Western counterparts.

The way wedding guests gather has also changed. Until the mid-20th century, guests still gathered at the groom's house to pick up the bride and take her to the church for the wedding. In the 1980s, however, the bride's guests gathered at her parents' house and the groom's guests gathered at his parents' house. According to Marija (granddaughter), this practice from the 80s has continued to this day. More recently, the meeting place of the wedding guests depends on the preferences of the bride and groom, who indicate this on the wedding invitation.

Danka (mother) and Marija (granddaughter) placed special emphasis on hair and make-up, which Mare (grandmother) considered not so important for the wedding ceremony. This can also be attributed to the harsh economic circumstances in which the participant lived when she got married. This implies that economic circumstances change wedding customs.

From the research, the day of the wedding ceremony and the duration of the wedding ceremony have changed from 1954 to the present. In the mid-20th century, the wedding ceremony began on Friday at the groom's house and continued the next morning, Saturday, at the bride's house. This was followed by the church ceremony, after which the wedding procession returned to the bride's house for lunch and, before dark, proceeded to the groom's house, where the festivities continued. In the 1980s, the wedding ceremony was held on Sundays, and due to the political circumstances of the time, the ceremony was held first in the registry office (Omiš) and then in the church (Trnbusi). After that, the bride's guests went to her family house (Trnbusi) and the groom's guests went to his house (Gornji Dolac) to celebrate the wedding. Today, according to Marija (granddaughter), the wedding ceremony takes place on Saturdays in the church, and after that the bride and groom, families and guests go to the wedding place to celebrate. The duration of the wedding varies depending on local and regional differences, as well as the decision of the bride and groom and their family. Today, an optimal sequence of the wedding ceremony and the wedding celebration has been established. It is limited in time and usually lasts no more than one day.

The seating arrangement at the wedding ceremony also changed over the course of the three generations. While Mare (grandmother) sat next to her cousin from Split and sister-in-law, Danka (mother) sat next to the witnesses and Marija (granddaughter) sat next to her husband and the witnesses at a separate table. In the past, the seating arrangement at the wedding ceremony was strictly determined by tradition and customs, but today it is subject to the preferences and choice of the bride and groom. This also depends on the size and arrangement of the premises for wedding ceremonies.

The traditional menu for wedding celebrations has not changed much in the Poljica region - cheese, dried ham, wine, boiled and roasted meat with some additional dishes depending on the preferences of the bride and groom. At the wedding of Marija (granddaughter) salad Olivier was served, which was not served at the weddings of her mother and grandmother.

An important part of the wedding ceremony is the wedding cake, which symbolizes happiness and wealth. From the interviews, it is common for the newlyweds to cut the wedding cake while holding the knife together. Nowadays, the cutting of the cake is accompanied by lascivious jokes. The newlyweds hold a knife together, listen to the instructions of the leader, who usually remains standing, and follow each instruction with “spicy” remarks. It is believed that cutting the cake is the first “activity” that the newlyweds do together. Although Ivanišević’s records do not mention a wedding cake made of brittle, it is important to say that such a cake is associated with weddings in Dalmatia. It can be assumed that the brittle croquant cake was introduced sometime in the second half of the 20th century. Nowadays, as well as in the recent past, it plays an important role in weddings.

We have also seen how some customs in wedding celebrations have changed over the generations. At Mare’s (grandmother’s) wedding, the bride’s bouquet was thrown, and an attempt was made to steal the bride’s shoe. At Danka’s (mother) wedding, the bouquet was not thrown, but given away, and there was a successful attempt to steal the shoe (which the best man then had to buy back). At the wedding of Marija (granddaughter), no shoe was stolen, but the bridal bouquet and garter were thrown. Ivanišević does not mention *such practices* in his records, so we can assume that they did not exist at the beginning of the 20th century. And the custom of garter throwing was introduced relatively recently due to the influence of Western culture, especially through movies and TV series. Today you can see garter throwing at almost every wedding in Croatia.

The custom of presenting gifts to the bride and groom at the wedding ceremony has survived in Poljica, but the nature of the gifts has changed over time - from clothing and money to furnishings for the new home and, more recently, only money. Also the alms are now the same for men and women, while in the 1950s they were different.

None of the participants had post-wedding customs like those described by Ivanišević in 1906 (Ivanišević, 2006). The post-wedding customs were limited to visits between the families of the newlyweds, so there was no extended socializing with the guests of the wedding ceremony and celebration. In the period recorded by Ivanišević, the influence of the clergy was more significant. Ivanišević wrote that the priests, along with the teachers, were the most revered people in the community. At the time when the second participant married, the political circumstances were such that sometimes it was not even allowed to marry in church. By contrast, at the time of the third participant’s marriage, and even today, the influence of the Church is more visible than in the late 20th century.

Today’s wedding customs in Croatia are shaped by local traditions and influences from Western culture (Vitez, 2004). In a free society, the personal preferences of the participants, especially the bride and groom, also play a role in every wedding ceremony. What the locals consider tradition is followed by new customs, such as organizing a bachelorette party, wearing a white wedding dress, or throwing the garter, which are common today.

Some may see this as abandoning tradition and traditional values, but for the new generations such practices may be interpreted differently.

Our study also has several limitations. Although the in-depth interview approach provides detailed participants' experiences, this qualitative approach does not allow the generalization of findings from the study sample to the entire population. Furthermore, the stories of the three participants collected in this research cannot be considered representative of all women in rural Croatia, because wedding customs in Croatia are very diverse due to different historical circumstances (Perković, 2020). Also, our sample included only three key informants, which is fewer than recommended (Dworkin, 2012). However, in our opinion, this did not significantly influence the quality of this study because these three participants covered the representation of three generations and because we also used a comparison between the historical records and our interviews.

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