

Selling and Sharing Culture: On Relations between Cultural Heritage, Nature Conservation and Tourism Development Institutions in the Upper Soča Valley, Slovenia

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In 2013, the municipalities of Tolmin and Kobarid proved to be successful in tourism development of the Upper Soča Valley: they quintupled tourist overnight stays. However, there are other institutions, like the Kobarid Museum (KM) and the Walk of the Peace Foundation (WP), which aim to further develop historical thematic paths of war in the region, an endeavour that started in Kobarid as early as 1990. The area is also located at the fringes of the Triglav National Park (TNP), a primarily nature conservation institution. In this article, the complex situation, in which cultural heritage dynamically oscillates between local conservation, political promotion and tourism development is examined.

Key words: power relations, tourism development, historical tourism, war heritage, nature conservation

The problem that I aim to address in this article is how the comprehension of cultural heritage has been changing over more than the two decades of tourism development in a small town of Kobarid, the centre of the contemporary Soča Valley destination. Since 1990, when heritage development officially started with the foundation of the Kobarid Museum (KM) of the First World War (WW1), many other cultural and tourism development organizations, institutions and associations have been established. Gradually, the new configuration of tourism business and heritage promotion started to frame the region's development, opening ever new opportunities for its residents and other stakeholders.

Tourism development usually includes the "politics of heritage", the "labelling", "indexing", "marketing", "branding", and "packing" of culture, places,

people, things and practices (Leite and Graburn 2010: 45–47). The “performative power of institutions” is enforced by its “use of the visual, pictures (and now film on the Internet), [which] frame and contextualize expectations, desires and choice within the market” (Crouch 2010: 86). However, the “fine line between ‘sharing culture’ and ‘selling out’” (Leite and Graburn 2010: 44) for the consumption by others is usually not questioned within the context of the tourism industry itself, but is of increasing importance within communities and in the agendas of tourism/culture/environment-related NGOs and organizations. Tourism is, at least on a declarative level, on everyone’s mouth in today’s Kobarid as well, but it is also a contesting frame, where the needs and wishes of institutions’ officials, political leaders, NGO representatives, land owners, restaurants, and other service enterprises on the one hand, and travel agencies, marketers, investors, domestic and foreign tourists, and other stakeholders on the other, are difficult to satisfy equally for all.

Many authors today agree that tourism can successfully become an integral part of the local culture (Leite and Graburn 2010: 40). This was also recognised by Amanda Stronza (2001), when she stated that “local communities are [increasingly] joining in partnerships with government agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and private tour companies to plan tourism strategies and develop new attractions for visitors. As a result, local hosts are gaining much more control over how tourism affects their communities” (Stronza 2001: 275). However, even if activities like, for example, collecting material heritage, organizing cultural events and residents’ increasing interest in old traditions and local curiosities are direct impulses of tourism development imagination, they can be at odds with basic practices of development organizations, investors, and other business stakeholders. Whenever there is a developed or even a developing destination, the resources are in some way always scarce, and the struggle over them between different actors with different values is, in fact, the norm (Hall 2003: 100). Individuals, interest groups and public and private organizations have inevitably different ideas about values and the distribution of resources, and they inevitably try to influence the direction of policy, the structure of institutional arrangements of tourism, government involvement in tourism, the nature of tourism, and the identification and representation of resources such as heritage, environment, attractions and the like (Hall 2003: 100–101).

The contested nature of tourism is therefore not evident only in the relations between the tourism development organizations and the residents, but can be seen in the relations between the development organizations themselves. Municipalities, museums, protected areas, and development agencies are all involved in the development process; an inter-institutional venture that in practice uses tourism for different ends and interests. Even

if a successful development process is the result of their collaboration, they mutually coordinate their basic activities according to how their visions of tourism are articulated and imagined.

On the public, bureaucratic and declarative level, the sustainability of development is beyond question.¹ Sustainable development can, apart from increasing local valuing of local environment and culture, be also seen as a social corrective that stems from different EU programmes, which are usually implemented through national and international projects on a grand scale. The local community is interpellated into wider national and EU policies through the notion of sustainable (tourism) development, while in practice, its implementation depends on how the interaction between the local organizations, the stakeholders, the political leaders, and the residents is played out. The common agenda and recognition of “tourism” as the right future development therefore sooner or later results in terms like “product diversification” and “market segmentation”, which means that at the final stage, the tourism business know-how does not only take over the organization of tourist offerings, but also the coordination of cultural heritage activities and to some extent nature conservation.

It is not a surprise that the concepts of economy and management prevail in government agencies and among tourism business managers at various levels when we talk about the evaluation and measurement of tourism in practice, but the economic impacts of tourism still remain a dominant feature of many disciplines (Jamal and Robinson 2010: 5; Mavrič and Urry 2010: 646). In this developmental view, tourism does not only “impact” culture and environment, but is integrated with other development forces, organizations and stakeholders, and is often also a force in itself that sustains and develops culture and environment at the same time (Jamal and Robinson 2010: 6).

Even if it is widely recognised that contemporary tourism means much more than only economic activity, the economic frame still seems very influential in terms of its qualitative categorization. In Kobarid, tourism is a common signifier of different cultural activities like, for example, nature conservation, heritage research, public events, infrastructure management, knowledge and art production and popular culture activities, but its central

¹ Defining, reproducing and promoting the sustainable development agenda is the common ground for all of the institutions. The centre of the sustainable development concept is the close interrelationship between culture and natural environment (see e.g. Mbaiwa and Stronza 2010: 333–338). The diversity of both is recognized and increasingly valued in Kobarid, although the emphases differ according to institution's scope of business; protected area representatives normally privilege biodiversity, tourist managers talk about quality forms of tourism and heritage specialists give preference to, for example, different thematic emphases in the landscape. Such forms or types are numerous. For this article it is, according to the features of the ethnographic case, worthy to mention ecotourism (or nature-based tourism) (Mbaiwa and Stronza 2010: 336–339), cultural (or cultural heritage) tourism (Orbašli and Woodward 2010), thanatourism (or dark tourism) (Seaton 2010), community based (or small-scale) tourism (CBT) (Singh, Timothy and Dowling 2003), theme parks (Hollinshead 2010) and culinary tourism (Long 2004).

conception is organized along the “hosts and guests” continuum. This means that the most common view of tourism is divided into categories such as camping sites, hotels, museums, private collections, adrenaline sports, restaurants etc. It is, in short, widely accepted, popularly recognised and expected (not only among residents, but also among other development institutions and stakeholders) that tourism is primarily a narrow economic activity, which has to be measured and presented using econometric indexes.

Moreover, this wide signification of tourism as an economic activity is also a consequence of larger economic and political processes, namely of “nationalization of culture” (Löfgren 1989) and its later Europeanization. In this sense, tourism is also a means of translating otherwise already established cultural activities into new discursive forms. The Spanish anthropologist Antonio Miguel Nogués Pedregal (2008) defined tourism as follows:

Tourism is one of the names of power. The noun tourism is the discursive form given to the complex set of symbolic and technical dispositifs (devices) that, linking the visible and expressible, allows certain groups of people to spend their leisure time away from their quotidian, including what they do at those places and the processes induced. (Nogués Pedregal 2008: 141)

Such conception of tourism focuses on “those practices that give meaning (content) to the labels and to the labelling process itself” (Nogués Pedregal 2008: 145). Taking this conception of tourism as a point of departure I will show how the conception of tourism has been changing in the context of different umbrella institutions that have been developing the region from the beginning of 1990s in the town of Kobarid. With this view, I therefore see tourism as “a lens through which to explore issues of political economy, social change and development, natural resource management, and cultural identity and expression” (Stronza 2001: 277).

SETTING AND CONTEXT

Kobarid is situated in the northwest of Slovenia, eight kilometres from the Italian border, at the meeting point of two valleys: the valley of the Nadiža river which stretches westward and the Soča valley in the east, which flows down to Tolmin and rises up to Bovec in the north. The area is mountainous with the first mountain chains of about 1.500 metres above the sea level, which continue to rise towards the north to the peaks of the Julian Alps that reach up to 2.500 metres above the sea level and higher. On its north, Kobarid is positioned at the fringe of the Triglav National Park (TNP), a national protected area in the northwest of Slovenia (see TNP 2014). The vicinity of the

national park has become a very important attractor of modern adrenalin sports tourists; an accessible playground and a forbidden fruit at the same time (for the e.g. mountain bikers see Kozorog and Poljak Istenič 2013).

Tourism development in Kobarid has been closely connected with the specific heritage of its turbulent history. Namely, the region was the scene of “the greatest highland battles in the human history that took place during the World War I.” (Občina Kobarid 2014). In 1990, a group of local enthusiasts established the Kobarid Museum (KM) of the First World War (WW1), which was soon granted the highest Slovenian museum award, the Valvazor prize in 1992 and nominated for the European Museum of the Year in 1993. In the same year, the KM received the Council of Europe Museum Prize for 1993 in Strasbourg (Kobarid museum 2014; Miklavčič-Brezigar 2002: 82–83). Ten years after the KM was founded, the Walk of Peace in the Soča Region Foundation (WP) was established, for the purpose of advancing the achievements of the KM, particularly with the purpose of acquiring deeper knowledge about the WW1 and the battlefields of the Isonzo Front (IF). Moreover, after a decade of successful promotion in Europe with a remarkable WW1 story and a strong anti-war message, Kobarid became an interesting political medium for the state of Slovenia. It is therefore no surprise that the initiative to establish the WP was supported by the government of Slovenia. The WP became not only the KM’s local historiographical centre and manager and promoter of WW1 thematic trails, but also a national coordinator and promoter of the WW1 in Europe; the owner of the WP house in Kobarid is the Ministry of Culture, which also partially finances the WP activities.²

More than two decades of work on heritage research, conservation and promotion resulted in a remarkably diverse and exemplarily arranged and presented cultural and historical heritage in Kobarid, which have seen rapid tourism development in the last years.³ The new meanings and practices of tourism have entered into the inter-institutional space of the Upper Soča Valley by the turn of the century. Especially Kobarid with its good position in the middle of the destination and next to the Italian border, and with its previous experience in historical tourism, was ready to take the next steps in the tourism business. In order to direct the tourism entrepreneurship of the local population, which was still in its initial stages at the time, the mu-

² Moreover, in 2012 the President of Slovenia Danilo Türk and the President of Italy Giorgio Napolitano became honorary patrons of the project of expansion of the IF trails from the Julian Alps to the Adriatic Sea, which was launched in 2011. An additional European Peace Memorial Park (corresponding to similar parks in Italy and France) is planned to be established on this trail.

³ According to the number of visitors and tourist overnight stays, the tourism boom was noted for the first time in 2011 (field notes from the formal presentation of Local Tourist Organization in Kobarid, November 2011).

municipalities of Kobarid and Tolmin established the Local Tourist Organization (LTO) “Sotočje” (i.e. “Confluence”) in 2000.

The LTO indeed took the leading position not only in the two municipalities, but in many respects also in the Upper Soča Valley as a whole. Soon after its establishment, the LTO started to subsume different local cultural activities and development agendas into its frame. With this, tourism gradually gained its position of a master term in the institutional landscape of the area. The new tourism discourse was no longer just a matter of the LTO and its members⁴, but more and more of the other cultural institutions, associations, civil organizations, interest groups and, last but not least, of the community as a whole. However, this does not mean that the tourism discourse entered into the social landscape of the region as a kind of a hegemonic stranger from the outside, but rather that its role as the master term was very consciously generated, adopted, and transformed by the local cultural and political agents and is still nuanced to meet the national and European policy agendas for the future development on the one hand, and the ever changing trends in the tourism industry on the other.

After the outline of the methodology, this tourism-induced inter-institutional space of Kobarid will be further presented, and its power relations and processes of destination management discussed and evaluated. I will argue that when tourism discourse is integrated within development, cultural heritage and nature conservation organizations and other complementary associations, as well as among stakeholders and residents, it is a force that not only sustains and develops culture and environment (Jamal and Robinson 2010: 6), but “transforms ‘nature’ into ‘environment’ and/or ‘culture’ into ‘cultural heritage’, *patrimonio*, a metonym of culture” (Nogués Pedregal 2008: 146). As such, tourism is also a vehicle through which the state and EU interpellate the cultural whole of the region into the frame of their bureaucratic apparatus. To follow these processes, I believe that the research position of the inter-institutional space enables understanding the nature of tourism development in each particular case.

METHODOLOGY

The research is, on the one hand, based on long-term observation of tourism and heritage development in the Upper Soča Valley, particularly in the mu-

⁴ In addition to eleven members of its council (consisting of representatives of the two municipalities), the LTO has some two hundred members: different small entrepreneurs, providers of accommodation and transport, owners of camping sites, hotels, restaurants and tourist farms, museums and other stakeholders.

municipality of Kobarid. I have been actively involved in organising youth volunteer tourism in the region as early as the second half of the 1990s, when the main concern was revitalizing remote areas and villages at the Italian border and arranging the local material heritage infrastructure, like, for example, evidencing and promoting small museums, private collections and cultural attractions and sights.⁵ On the other hand, the materials for this particular research, which is still in progress, derive from five intensive weekend workshops that I organised for students of the course in Anthropology of Tourism at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Ljubljana between 2011 and 2013. Two of the workshops were carried out in November 2011 (32 students), one in December 2012 (10 international students), and two in November and December 2013 (25 students).

The students were introduced to the field by formal presentations of the relevant institutions (the LTO, the TNP, the WP and the municipality). Their employees were usually additionally interviewed by individual students in the following days. Overall, the students conducted and transcribed far more than fifty interviews with different tourism providers and stakeholders in the region. However different the quality of these interviews was – some of them were rather short and did not amount to more than two pages in transcript, while others were extensive and consisted of ten pages and more – they covered a wide range of diverse activities that were in one way or another connected with the tourism business and development in the region: the owners of camping sites, apartments and restaurants, organizers of different festivals, employees in the private tourism sector such as cooks, waiters, guides and chauffeurs, members of cultural associations, heritage collectors, shepherds and milk producers, fishermen and hunters, residents (i.e. observers of changes in their hometown) and others. At the end of each (field) working day, the findings were discussed in focus groups. The students were required to present the materials at the Faculty, and finally to submit written essays based on their work.

The aim of this research was, first, to approach the field of tourism development using a terminology that corresponds to today's anthropological view of tourism. Although this point seems obvious, it was of tremendous importance to think about tourism in terms of the process of place-making that follows the production of tourism discourses on national in transnational levels and not in terms of "practice" on the spot. The complex networks of tourism business in Kobarid have their own institutionally induced categorisations, which insistently guide the researcher's views towards the

⁵ Perhaps it is not unimportant to mention that I am from Kobarid. As I have not participated in any of decision-making processes in the development of the area in the last years, I assume no political aspect of this fact influences the results of this research.

obvious structure of the tourism offer (i.e. attractions, tourism products, accommodation types, sport activities, thematic trails, etc.). Without the initial questioning of this structure and the institutional categories, one would end up in reproducing tourism brochures.

We therefore started from questions such as how the boundaries between tourism development institutions are presented by the institutions' workers themselves as well as by the entrepreneurs and residents? How the inter-institutional space has been emerging due to the forces of global tourism trends and (inter)national heritage politics, and how the negotiations between the institutions result in the tourism landscape of the region? What is the meaning of "tourism infrastructure" and how are the processes of participation and ownership of its institutionally chosen and constructed elements played out? How are the notions of sustainability, development, heritage and – indeed – "tourism" itself publicly understood and explained in accordance with the larger frames of EU and national policies and how are they translated into heritage and tourism business practices (e.g. the meanings and importance of the "eco" prefix, natural environment, tradition, museum artefacts, identity etc.)?

And finally, the purpose of this research was to either directly or indirectly influence the public production of meanings of tourism development and the inter-institutional space. Although we assumed that there would be many limitations that would not let our opinions and anthropological thoughts even be heard, we succeeded in at least provoking debates and reflections on tourism development by our critical and – for economists, managers and local politicians – non-conventional questions. The very performative nature of the interview already opens up reflections that otherwise perhaps would not have taken place in the direction of basic questions about the meaning of tourism. It is difficult to "measure" or even guess the influence of interview-based discourses, but we felt, at least on some occasions, that the practitioners of tourism and heritage management lacked the arguments and terminology that would go beyond the sheer notions of economic gains of tourism development and the obviousness of the value of heritage and nature protection for the next generations. Last but not least, although the acquired student materials, as stated before, differed in quality, some of the essays' are of outstanding quality, which means that further steps are planned, namely to co-publish the texts in a volume with (at least) the municipality of Kobarid. With this, the circle of the workshops would be fully concluded; the interlocutors of the research and the ethnographic interviewees would get back the information that they gave to the students arranged in the form of a monograph.

In addition to organizing, coordinating, tutoring, and leading the workshops and analysing the collected materials, I conducted six in-depth

interviews myself and participated in many local events: the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the local Mountaineering Association in Kobarid (October 2012), the public presentation of local NGOs entitled The Day of Volunteering in Kobarid (October 2012), the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the integration of the TNP into UNESCO's programme Man and Biosphere – Julian Alps (November 2013), and the annual meeting of the LTO and its stakeholders (December 2013).⁶ As the coordinator of the project, I talked with the representatives of the major development institutions (the KM, the TNP, the LTO, the municipality and the WP).

The present article is therefore not an outcome of these materials per se. However, the process of leading their gathering helped me greatly in understanding the complexity of the field and in turning my attention towards its productive core, the inter-institutional space. As I also participated in many of the student interviews and did my own participant observation in the course of the workshops, my own field notes were the most valuable for this article. The pieces of information were additionally checked on the internet and compared with the literature on tourism development.

KOBARID MUSEUM AND WALK OF PEACE

In the mountains surrounding Kobarid, the so called *battle of Kobarid* between the Austro-Hungarian and the German forces against the Italian forces took place in October 1917, during the IF of the WW1, which “placed Kobarid on the world map” (Kobarid Museum 2014: section guided tours). The KM is the first and the most recognized institution in the Soča Valley, which was founded in 1990 and immediately attracted the wider attention of Slovenian museologists. Its commercial orientation, emphasis on stories and ideas instead of “things”, an emotional anti-war message, attachment to the particular territory etc. were all signs of “new museology”, whose principles had not been realized anywhere in Slovenia before (Miklavčič-Brezigar 2002: 28–31). The recognition of this progressiveness was, as already stated, proved in the Valvazor prize in 1992 and in the Council of Europe Museum Prize for 1993.

On its founding, the museum started to operate within the frame of the then revived Tourist Society of Kobarid. Five years later, the management of the KM was transferred to a non-profit company of limited liability. With

⁶ The last two events were also attended by the students when they conducted their field work. We were very warmly welcomed, especially because it was “pleasant to see that the young generation is interested in heritage”. So they could chat with participants long after the formal part was finished, and we discussed the events and their implications in focus groups afterwards in the evening.

the help of local supporters,⁷ the founders gradually arranged the circular Kobarid Historical Trail in the next five years. The trail included Italian defence lines along the banks of the Soča river, the charnel house of Italian soldiers (built in 1938, and managed by the Italian state), the remains of a Roman settlement, an archaeological site of late antique fortified settlement, the Napoleon's bridge over the Soča gorge and the waterfalls of Kozjak (Miklavčič-Brezigar 2002: 83–84; see Figure 1 and 2).



Figure 1 and 2: The information board of the first thematic trail in Kobarid, which includes WW1 remains, archaeological sites and natural attractions (1) and a section of the Kobarid Historical Trail leading along the Soča canyon (photo by the author, 2014)

⁷ Formally there are six employees in the KM. When it was founded there were 66 supporters evidenced (interview with the director of KM, November 2011).

The KM had completely redefined the identity of Kobarid through the 1990s and made it a first-class European attraction. It was not before 2000 that a new institution relating to the IF was founded: the WP. The WP was primarily founded to scientifically upgrade the KM. And it certainly did, as its team established a specialized library and documentation centre with a database on the IF. Nevertheless, the WP also remarkably widened the network of trails along the restored and arranged IF lines, built six outdoor museums along it, established an information centre with an interactive exhibition of the area, a souvenir shop where additional promotional materials and maps can be found, a hall where cultural events and meetings can be held etc. The WP has also trained their own guides, who can offer guided tours through the heritage of the IF in English, Italian, German, French, Croatian and Serbian. And finally, they developed a searchable register of the Austro-Hungarian, German and Italian soldiers killed at the IF, which is especially interesting to the relatives and families of the soldiers. Although many of them are anonymous, the WP is extending the database every year (the Walk of Peace 2014; formal presentation at the WP centre, November 2011).

There are five employees in the WP. However, the WP also has numerous collaborators among local and neighbouring Italian cultural associations, among amateur collectors, as well as numerous consultants and collaborators in the area of historical research, for example from the Tolmin Museum (TM), the Slovenian Academy of Science and Art, the Institute for the Protection of Natural and Cultural Heritage of Slovenia and individual researchers from EU museum institutions through partnerships with EU projects. Of course, they sometimes also meet with the local representative of the TNP. However, as the majority of their trails are situated outside the TNP's territory, these relations are rarely of a formal kind (formal presentation at the WP centre, November 2011).

THE LOCAL TOURIST ORGANIZATION AND THE TRIGLAV NATIONAL PARK

The LTO Sotočje, similar to the WP, belongs to a younger generation of institutions in the valley, which took tourism as the main means of the valley's development. As already briefly stated, the LTO was founded by the municipalities of Tolmin and Kobarid in 2000, for the purpose of organizing modern tourism in the region, centralizing the tourist offer, creating tourist products and destination trademarks, and promoting them worldwide via the Slovenian tourist board and different tourism fairs and exhibitions. The LTO is a non-profit organization. It has seven employees and also occasion-

ally offers seasonal work to students. Apart from a regular preparation of evaluations and strategies for the future tourism development, the LTO provides information and booking services for the tourists, creates numerous brochures, maps, postcards, souvenirs and other materials, organizes public events, offers guided tours, sport programmes, transfers and more (Kozorog 2009: 135–136).

In fact, it is very difficult to capture the LTO's dynamics. We can treat it as a common denominator of the two municipalities, which finance it on an annual basis and which take all of the important decisions through an official body of eleven representatives (the LTO Council). In addition to this, the LTO, similarly to the WP, raises funds through EU programmes (e.g. Interreg). The LTO is an intermediary between heritage and nature conservation institutions and other institutions that deal with diverse infrastructures in the region. It intermediates between the numerous stakeholders and the tourist service providers, restaurants and transport providers. It also manages two important sights⁸ in the Soča Valley and the seasonal parking regime at the river Nadiža.⁹ In all these places the LTO collects entrance and parking fees. The main tourist information centre (TIC) of the LTO was founded in April 2010, and is located in the so-called Green House, in the Kobarid central square. The Green House is shared with the TNP's Info Point (the upper floor). The purpose of this arrangement is, as stated on the TNP's homepage, to implement "the idea to connect agriculture, tourism and nature conservation with sustainable development" and "to present the tourist assets and the natural and cultural heritage of Zgornje Posočje (Upper Soča Valley) and the Triglav National Park" (TNP 2014, <http>).

In addition to the WP thematic trail, the LTO successfully included the destination into the Alpe Adria Trail (Carinthia, Slovenia and Friuli Venezia Giulia) and the Regional Destination Organization's Emerald Trail. In September and October every year a Hiking Festival is organized by the LTO (guided hiking tours, exhibitions, lectures). For every such event, activity or cooperation, brochures, leaflets, posters and web information are produced. On the existing trails new signs with ever more logos are placed. This does not mean that a kind of a mass pollution with signs is taking place in the destination, because the trails in most cases do not overlap. But in some

⁸ The two sights are the wooden Memorial Church in Javorca, one of the finest monuments to the WW1 bearing the European Cultural Heritage Sign and the Tolmin gorges, the lowest and southernmost entry into the TNP (see Soca Valley 2012).

⁹ The Nadiža River is the warmest Alpine river in the region and has several pools and small gorges, as well as beaches. Already by the turn of the century it became very popular among the domestic visitors from the wider region and especially from the cities. Nadiža represents the first example of serious pressure on the environment and on local communities that live in its valley (the Kobarid's sub-destination of Breginjski kot). In order to at least temporarily solve the problem of chaotic traffic all over the narrow roads and lanes around the river in summer, the municipality and the LTO arranged the traffic regime.

sections, especially in those that pass close to villages, some of the trails cannot but intersect. This kind of overlapping can be, for example, seen in the following picture (Figure 3) from the village of Drežnica near Kobarid, and in the explanation that is provided on the destination's homepage (cf. the citation under Figure 3):



Figure 3: Overlapping of thematic trails and institutions: the WP, the Alpe Adria Trail, the Mountaineering Association, the LTO Sotočje and the Tourist Association of Drežnica (photo by the author, 2014)

The Walk of Peace is extra marked. It mainly runs along the existing mountain and tourist paths. For those who would like to extend their visit, the Walk can be the point of departure for more demanding tours to the nearby mountains. (Soca Valley 2012, <http>)

RELATIONS BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS AND THE OVERWHELMING FRAME OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The representation of the valley has changed remarkably with the LTO's presence in the last decade or so. To the image of the former Kobarid/museum town the common trademark of the Soča Valley was added. This commodified version of the valley is organized into four sections today: the "Valley of Action", "Energy", "Discoveries", and "Festivals" (Soca Valley 2012). In this new image the contents of the old institutions, like the TNP and the KM fall under the section of the "Valley of Discoveries".¹⁰ The other three sections mainly cover tourist activities like adrenalin sports, hiking, fishing, eating and attending events. In practice, these contents represent a kind of generic ingredients for individual tourist products, which can be arranged according to the tourists' wishes in the TIC.

When the KM started to develop the story of the WW1 in the 1990s, Kobarid got an entirely new identity. The town started to be named after the museum and not *vice versa*. Even today the entrance roads to Kobarid feature welcoming boards saying the "Historical town of Kobarid".¹¹ The museum has its own way of management (segmentation of target groups, attracting important guests, particularly visitors from the neighbouring countries, school groups and groups of Italian students, promotion of guided tours to the battlefields in combination with hiking in the high mountains etc.), which results in 70.000 visitors per year.¹²

¹⁰ For example, natural sights, cultural and historical sights and trails, museums and collections, heritage of the WW1, TNP and more can be found there.

¹¹ However, another set of KM boards were added at the side of these roads some years later, which only advertise the museum itself (see Figures 4 and 5).

¹² This is an average number. In 1993, the year of Europe Museum Price, for example, the number almost reached 90.000 visitors (interview with the director of the KM, November 2011). However, in comparison to other similar institutions in Europe and worldwide, this number is not that high. For example the WW1 battle sites in France receive 20 million tourists per year (Chrisafis 2011) and the London's group of Imperial War Museums welcomes more than two million visitors each year (Gordon 2013), to name just a few. However, it is also worthy to mention the WW1 centenary in 2014, which will be marked with organized remembrance of the outbreak of the WW1 and official commemoration ceremonies, conferences, erections of new monuments and sculptures, and openings of new museums all over Europe (see Centenary 2014). These comparisons and context mean that the KM is very important locally and nationally, but its future European importance also depends on how it will succeed in mobilizing other Kobarid's tourism development institutions to make use of the WW1 centenary events and networks.



Figure 4 and 5: The wayside boards on the western entrance road to Kobarid advertising the “Historical town of Kobarid” and the Kobarid Museum (photo by the author, 2014)

Ironically, apart from its relative recognition in the EU, the KM was not added to the official register of Slovenian museums until 2011 (Kobarid Museum 2014, [http](http://www.kobarid.si)). Despite the enthusiasm with which museologists regarded the KM as the first example of an “eco-museum” in Slovenia, which initiated a cultural, social and economic development of the wider area, and despite the fact that its know-how was further applied within the frame of the TNP (Miklavčič-Brezigar 2002: 82–85),¹³ the Slovenian national museum politics has long treated the KM as “a collection” and not as a proper museum. From the point of view of the KM, particularly the neighbouring Tolmin museum (TM), a public institution, appeared to act as the main obstacle to the inclusion of the KM on the official register. Under this influence, the mayors of municipalities were long hesitant to agree to this step (interview with the director of the KM, November 2011). Indeed, from the point of view of the TM, the KM was never a proper museum, but more of a company (interview with an employee of the TM, November 2011). Nevertheless, the already mentioned WPs Register of Soldiers Killed was made in collaboration with the TM, which may, because of the competitiveness between the TM and KM,

¹³ The TNP decided to build a museum/information center in the Valley of Trenta (the upper part of the Upper Soča Valley) in 1989. The conception of this center followed the example of the KM. It was opened in 1995, and named “Information Centre Trenta Lodge” (Miklavčič-Brezigar 2002: 115, 128).

seem ironic. However, the decades of the region's development have changed the power relations and their structural dynamics. Moreover, the institutions are forced to cooperate due to the numerous instruments of partnership that are implemented through national and EU programmes and projects.

The establishment of the WP was only the beginning of the overall reorganization of the institutional landscape of Kobarid, as well as of the Upper Soča Valley. As already mentioned, the main purpose of the foundation of the WP was the "scientification" of the IF, so that the historical tourism of Kobarid would be firmly based on knowledge. But apart from this, the WW1 also has a strong ideological connotation for the state and its national history. With a proper and scientifically firmly grounded and politically "neutral" exposition of the WW1, Slovenia was able to detach itself from the "Yugoslavian" history of the WW2 and started to present itself with a Europeanised version of history. Indeed, the relation of the KM and WP to the state is obvious. Last but not least, as already stated, the Ministry of Culture is the owner of WP's house, which, together with some other state official bodies, finances WP's basic activities and maintains its infrastructure.¹⁴ Apart from this, the deeper roots of the importance of the KM and the WP on the national level can be also seen in terms of instruments for the collective release of memories on the WW1 in the context of inner feelings of what Luisa Passerini, investigating the testimonies on Fascism called a "system of mental representations" (1987: 106) in terms of patriomonal resistance and sense of inner integrity and pride in collective positioning towards the painful past. This mental register that was overwhelmed by the memories of the WW2 in the Yugoslavian frame could find its new medium in the WW1 only after independence.

Apart from the deeper meanings of the WW1 and the need for the "scientification" of the IF, the "touristification" of its infrastructures also took place. The orientation to specific tourism was by no means in conflict with the national or with the KM's policy, as "promotion" was, and is, the magic word of today's EU and, indeed, of the globalized world as a whole (see Crouch 2010: 85–88). The second pole of the tourism development process started to take place through environmentalist-biased discourses (see Figure 6). The green nature and the vicinity of the TNP became the ground for new promotional opportunities of the historical trail and it was only for this reason that the LTO was needed to attract and manage hikers and other outdoor sports tourists, as well as nature admirers from the cities.

¹⁴ Nevertheless, the state is not the only financer of the WP. The upgrading of its infrastructure has been financed through EU programmes, like, for example, the Swiss contribution and the Cross Border Cooperation (CBC).



Figure 6: A wayside board of the EU programmes trail: Slowtourism, Regional development (CBC) programme and Natura 2000 in the vicinity of Kobarid

The LTO inherited an already established destination with already established core institutions and infrastructure.¹⁵ Its position in such circumstances was, and continues to be, very fragile in relation to the municipalities, to the other heritage and environment protection institutions, and to the numerous

¹⁵ Due to the scope of this article, it is impossible to review the host of institutions that operated, and are still operating in tourism development either on the regional and national or on the local level. However, as Kozorog (2009: 129–144) has shown, many parallel processes on different levels were crucial for the local position of the LTO Sotočje: changes in national tourism and governmental legislation, competitive relations between the municipalities, the practical and legislative consequences of the strong earthquake in 1998, the existence of numerous civil tourist associations in the region, including the *regional* Tourist Association of the Upper Soča Valley etc. Last but not least, when we talk about the general development (and not solely tourism development) in the Upper Soča Valley, we should not fail to mention the importance of the regional development agency, The Soča Valley Development Centre (slo. *Posoški Razvojni Center*, PRC), which was established by the three Valley's municipalities in 1999, and which stimulates the most fundamental means of development of entrepreneurship, human resources, environment and place infrastructural arrangements and development of rural areas (see e. g. its programme 2007–2013 on PRC 2014). Although the institution seems “invisible” in the frame of *tourism* development, it presents not only the basic role in developing, for example, transport, electricity, waste and water infrastructure, but also mirrors the state's and the EU's changes in institutional arrangements of the 1990s and the first decade of this century. In the most fundamental way, the PRC represents the outcome of the model of regional agencies, which was gradually launched by the state in implementing the European ideas of decentralization and regionalization of EU politics (see e.g. Jessop 2002).

members and stakeholders in the tourism business. From the very beginning, the LTO was expected to coordinate the tourism business, but in the inter-institutional space its primary role was to be integrative (see also Kozorog 2009: 144). With the process of building a new destination trademark and products, the LTO had to reintegrate an already integrated institutional landscape; an exercise which required mainly investing energy and time in knowledge about culture. However, the LTO system did not subsume the old one, but created a parallel one, which corresponded to the global tourism industry. The building of the complex destination of the Soča Valley certainly does not omit the inherited achievements of Kobarid. Nevertheless, it places them in another context.

In the last months, a crisis emerged within the LTO Sotočje, as the council is politically divided and the director that has headed the LTO for thirteen years resigned and accepted a new position in the LTO of the neighbouring municipality of Bovec.¹⁶ Nevertheless, even before this serious crisis, the members have been constantly expressing doubts about what it is that the LTO actually does. Even if they never had to pay for membership, but were only required to take part in at least one LTO activity every three years (e.g. present themselves in a brochure, at an event and the like), there has always prevailed a general feeling that the LTO should do things for them more directly. Many accommodation providers, for instance, expect the LTO to bring tourists to them. They would like to know exactly how the promotion of the destination, the tourist products, the themes and the brands will benefit them specifically. They are interested in money first, and only then in destination products, thematizing the valley, community values, sustainability of development and the like. Through the years, it became obvious that the LTO has to promote not only the Soča Valley destination to the markets, but also itself as an institution to its members and to its financers; the municipalities.¹⁷ Their model of evaluating tourism development persistently sticks to the concepts of economy: the statistically measured and presented data of economic growth; the practice, which is frequently noticed for the global context of tourism development in general (Jamal and Robinson 2010: 5; Mavrič and Urry 2010: 646).

¹⁶ The municipality of Bovec had, strangely enough, founded its own LTO in 2000. The main reason for this separation was that the Bovec municipality regarded itself a more developed tourism destination than Kobarid and Tolmin (Kozorog 2009: 132–133). However, Bovec had lost its momentum in the recent years, especially because of maintaining its old winter sports infrastructures from the 1980s. In this respect, Kobarid and Tolmin took over the central position in the last years. Competitive relations between the three municipalities have been evident over the decades and at the moment they show no tendency of decline.

¹⁷ About 60 percent of their finances come from municipality funds (Formal presentation of the LTO, December 2013).

CONCLUSION

Understanding of culture and cultural heritage is increasingly gaining importance in tourism. Apart from cultural heritage in the narrow sense of mainly preserving its material remains, a “good story” is even more important, as the case of the KM and the WP has clearly shown. However, culture as a way of life is strongly related to the natural environment and is ascribed to a particular landscape, which is the basis of the sustainable development agenda (see e.g. Stronza 2001: 274–276). The latter is strongly advocated by the TNP in the context of the valley’s tourism. From the inter-institutional point of view, tourism is becoming more and more complex and fragmented in its relation to the resources and communities. It is increasingly able to segment the market and differentiate its products in accordance with the overall requirements for sustainable development. For this reason, tourism can be seen as a proactive force today, which, integrated with other development aims and organizations, rather than having an “impact” on culture and environment, contributes to their sustainability and careful development (Jamal and Robinson 2010: 6). However, even if all of the major institutions in Kobarid agree on the basic point that tourism is crucial for the future survival of the valley, the understanding of tourism varies according to the narrower interests of each of them.

The dichotomy between community-based approaches to tourism management (see e.g. Singh, Timothy and Dowling 2003) and economic, entrepreneur- and market-oriented development in the Upper Soča Valley was already uncovered by Kozorog (2009: 144–152).¹⁸ Drawing primarily on ethnographic fieldwork, he noticed that the LTO Sotočje could not but justify its *raison d’être* by econometrically presenting the annual growth of overnight stays, the growing numbers of entrepreneurs and service providers, the success in marketing and promotion of the destination’s individual attractions and of the destination as a whole (Kozorog 2009: 151).

With the introduction of new roles for the LTO in the context of other cultural and environmental (and tourism-oriented) institutions in the town of Kobarid, one would expect that this economy-centric situation would change. And it did, but rather than clearly in favour of community-based tourism it changed towards an inter-institutional complexity of the destination, which, also resulted in a shift towards knowledge-based practice in developing tourism. However, the core of the local knowledge production is on the heritage side of tourism development, while its business side has to deal with powers of the global tourism industry and is, according to

¹⁸ Ethnographic part of Kozorog’s research was conducted between April 2002 and October 2005, and was mainly focused on emerging festivals in Tolmin, a “destination in the making” (Kozorog 2009: 25).

Jafari's (2001) scheme of knowledge production,¹⁹ stuck in the advocacy and adaptancy phases. However hard tourism management institutions work on the local knowledge and its recognition, it always seems to be skipped when there comes a time to take strategic decisions for the future. As Leite and Graburn (2010) noted, "[anthropology] views tourism as a context in which the global not only affects, but *becomes* the local, and vice versa" (Leite and Graburn 2010: 53). In this view, tourism is a complex discursive form (Nogués Pedregal 2008: 141) that enters into the inter-institutional space and changes institutional practices.

The question in this case was therefore not whether the LTO has succeeded in successfully thematizing the destination. For even if the thematic compartmentalization would ever be a matter of serious negotiations between the local development institutions (for example, because of the increased pressure on resources), the frame of the tourism industry and its economic approach to the labelling processes would always represent a power in its own right, which is not based in a single institution, but scattered in the inter-institutional space and in the community as a whole. Yet, as Hall (2003) stated in his "Analysis of power in tourism communities":

The application of models of community participation in tourism planning which assume the pluralistic allocation of power within a community may unwittingly serve to reinforce existing power structures to the exclusion of oppositional and contrary perspectives. These include [...] also those who simply do not want tourism in their community. (Hall 2003: 111)

The question of how to build a system that would function equally well for all of the interested parties is of course not an academic discussion on the meaning of the very term of "tourism". It concerns the distribution of work and money, the development of certain sub-regions, infrastructure, institutional bodies, the forthcoming season, and especially (new) laws and bureaucratic procedures. In short, it concerns the everyday practice of many institutions and stakeholders, and not the meaning of "tourism". Yet, the term is present in every institution's development programme; every association, however small, talks about the beneficial role of tourism for the development of the community, and every public statement about the region includes "tourism" as one of its core markers. As a consequence, the plurality of different cultural activities may either be integrated into the overwhelming frame of "tourism" as a separate "theme", may vanish from the institutional landscape as a relic from the past or may – in a best-case scenario – be put into hibernation or

¹⁹ Jafar Jafari's (2001) four platform model of tourism studies consist of advocacy, cautionary (1970s), adaptancy (1980s) and knowledge (from late 1990s on) platform or research position. The advocacy platform is drawn on in Jamal and Robinsons' relation between tourism and policy (2010: 6).

into a stand-by mode in the inter-institutional space as an element of “the local culture” or as a “thing for the residents”. In this case, the old institutions with their not only tourism-related development agendas, such as the KM and the TNP, perhaps represent a balancing corrective to the new development institutions, such as the WP and the LTO.

Therefore, what really formed the context in this case was the density of diverse institutions that has been founded in the last three decades and created different infrastructures with different emphases, which accorded with corresponding moments in wider development agendas and trends in Slovenian and European recent history. This process of development was not played out in a manner that would substitute older institutions with new ones, or that would integrate numerous small institutions into a smaller number of bigger ones, but went on as an almost spontaneous growth of ever new institutions and a modernization of the existing ones. The old institutions with their infrastructures are still there, while the new ones overgrow them much like a palimpsest. Thus, the result in today’s institutional landscape of the Upper Soča Valley is an integration of institutions into a single economic frame of “tourism” and the articulation of their different activities in terms of thematic branches of the destination’s tourist offer.

For the local heritage associations with their past results in built infrastructures, thematic paths, small museums, collections, season festivals etc., the tourism frame still lies in its old view of “guests arriving to see (and admire) the sights” tourism. They actually have in mind a different “tourism” than the umbrella destination managers. For many, doing “tourism” is not primarily promoting the destination as a whole. Namely, in expecting “guests”, many of the associations lose their time in maintaining empty shells of infrastructures that are categorised in the destination management as a “thematic” addition to the otherwise “real” destination. For in the frame of destination management, experience is not that much the “experience of the sign” (Crouch 2010: 86–87; cf. Urry 1990), but of action, of “doing” or “tasking” (Crouch 2010: 89), not of being, but of becoming (ibid.:90–91). The site, its landscape, heritage and “otherness” is a single, albeit powerful, content of the Soča Valley marketing, but the other is actual practices that tend to be highly organized. To wrap both of the aspects together, Crouch suggests:

The individual consumer, or tourist, engages the world through feeling; as a connector with the environment, destinations, activities, as well as referring to mediated images, brands and so on. (Crouch 2010: 91)

We should therefore distinguish between promoting diversity (i.e. thematizing of the tourism product) and emerging diversity, which stems from a different view of tourism by different local associations, entrepreneurs, stake-

holders and different types of tourists. In the local context, each institution has a different conception of tourism in mind and different interests attached to it. However, this situation does not result in the plurality of “regenerative development planning” (Nogués Pedregal 2008: 147), but rather in “thematic tourism”, which derives from inter-institutional consensus about the commodification of cultural heritage and the natural environment and about corresponding mythmaking, which, to meet the economic beneficial goals, has to be accorded with the overall trends and business practices of the industry.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to the institutions of Kobarid for presentations of their work and availability to the students of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology of the University of Ljubljana. I have also benefited tremendously from the numerous discussions with the students in my course “Anthropology of Tourism” and the fieldwork tutorial in Kobarid (2011–2013), as well as from the discussions with my colleagues within the national research project *Triglav National Park: Heritages, Actors – Strategies, Questions, and Solutions* (2011–2014).

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PRODAVANJE I DIJELJENJE KULTURE: O ODNOSIMA IZMEĐU KULTURNE BAŠTINE, OČUVANJA PRIRODE I INSTITUCIJA ZA RAZVOJ TURIZMA U GORNJOJ DOLINI RIJEKE SOČE, SLOVENIJA

SAŽETAK

U članku se prikazuju međuinstitucionalni razmjeri u Kobaridu, gradu smještenom u gornjoj dolini rijeke Soče, na sjeverozapadu Slovenije. Rad zahvaća problem nezastavljivog jačanja ekonomskih oblika turističkog diskursa među različitim institucijama i organizacijama koje se bave općim razvojem regije. Pažnja se usredotočuje na Lokalnu turističku organizaciju "Sotočje", koju su 2000. godine zajednički osnovala gradska poglavarstva Kobarida i Tolmina, a koja je počela utjecati na program rada drugih institucija koje nisu bile primarno usmjerene na turizam, poput Kobaridskog muzeja Prvog svjetskog rata, Ustanove "Fundacija puta mira u Posočju" i Nacionalnog parka Triglav, koje prvenstveno zagovaraju povijesno istraživanje baštine i promicanje bioraznolikosti i održivosti regije. U članku se turizam shvaća kao kišobranski termin koji obuhvaća rad svih navedenih institucija, kao i brojnih manjih udruga u okolnim selima kojima je cilj promicanje lokalne baštine. Ova složena situacija, u kojoj mnoge institucije rade na razvoju turizma na malom području, analizira se ne samo iz lokalne perspektive, nego i u kontekstu nacionalnih i europskih politika i upravljanja.

Ključne riječi: odnosi moći, razvoj turizma, povijesni turizam, ratna baština, očuvanje prirode