



Sinfo

NOVEMBER 2010

BUSINESS • CULTURE • ENVIRONMENT • POLITICS • SPORTS

VINTAGE 2010



20 ART & CULTURE

SYMBOL OF SLOVENIAN-CROATIAN FRIENDSHIP ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY IN LJUBLJANA



Vesna Žarkovič
Editor

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE FUTURE...

...so the saying goes. But this future is shrinking from year to year. As a result of the ageing population, the number of young people is slowly but steadily falling. Not only that, but young people today are finding it increasingly difficult to become independent, because of problems connected with education, employment and housing. In this month's In Focus section we ask where this situation is leading. The other In Focus topic this month is winemaking and the question of Slovenia's contribution to the treasury of European and world wines. There is no doubt that two thousand years of tradition have defined our present characteristics. Alongside autochthonous varieties (Zelen, Pinela, Cviček) and domesticated varieties (Welschriesling, Furmint, Ribolla, Malvasia, Refosco) that conserve a unique genome, our contribution will also be evident in the efforts of winegrowers and winemakers to find in the domestic soil, turned over countless times, constant incentives to create new styles of wine.

“
IF SOMETHING IS GOOD AND DIFFERENT, IT WILL SELL
”

'If something is good and different, it will sell,' says Terme Olimia director Zdravko Počivalšek, the subject of our interview, who has been named this year's Manager of the Year by the Manager Association. Recent financial data show that Terme Olimia has tripled its revenue in ten years.

The winner of this year's Rožanc Essay Prize is Peter Kovačič Peršin. Even without this accolade, Kovačič Peršin would be well worth presenting. His own story is, in fact, a unique summary of the social development and, even more, the intimately human development and changes that took place in Slovenia in the second half of the 20th century.

This winter promises to be an exciting one, with a full programme of major sports events. With the winter sports season just around the corner, we follow with close attention the preparations of Slovenia's top winter athletes, hoping, like every year, that the coming season will be even better than the year before.

This month you can also read the first in a series of monthly commentaries on the latest political and economic measures adopted by the government. The monthly commentary is a new column by our director Darijan Košir.

Vesna Žarkovič

MONTHLY COMMENTARY
New solution to outstanding issues

04

IN FOCUS

"The world is founded on young people...", Ljubljana has its own grapevine

06

INTERVIEW

Zdravko Počivalšek - 'If something is good and different, it will sell.'

12

BUSINESS

First train of the Cargo 10 alliance

16

LETTER FROM AMBASSADOR

Doku Zavgaev, Ada Filip Slivnik

18

ART & CULTURE

13th Festival of Slovenian Film in Portorož, 45th Maribor Theatre Festival

20

OUR EXCELLENCE

Elite emigrants, Jožef Stefan Institute

25

SLOVENIAN DELIGHTS

'Rôtisseurs' in Slovenia

31

SPORTS

Exciting winter on the cards, with plenty of outstanding sport

35

PEOPLE

Portrait of Peter Kovačič Peršin

37

NATURAL HERITAGE

Connecting nations and conserving memories

41

CULTURAL HERITAGE

Traditional heritage in step with the times

44



9



12



29



25



35

Cover photo Vladimir Toš/STO

Sinfo - Slovenian information

Editorial Government Communication Office
Gregorčičeva 25, 1000 Ljubljana
Tel. +386 1 478 2630, Fax +386 1 251 2312, www.ukom.gov.si
Director Darijan Košir
Editor-in-Chief Valerija Mencej, Valerija.Mencej@gov.si
Executive Editor: Vesna Žarkovič, Vesna.Zarkovic@gov.si
Editorial Board Alenka Čebular, Albert Kos, Mateja Malnar Štembal, Valerija Mencej, Jože Osterman, Polona Prešeren, Andreja Šonc Simčič, Andrej Savelli, Branko Vidrih
Photo Editor Veronica Ditrh
Production Videotop Color Media d.o.o.
Graphic design Boštjan Krajnc **Printed by** Mobinet

Gateway to information on Slovenia www.slovenia.si
Government Communication Office www.ukom.gov.si
Government of the Republic of Slovenia www.vlada.si
Slovenian Tourist Board www.slovenia.info
Slovenian Chamber of Commerce and Industry www.gzs.si
Slovenian Chamber of Craft www.ozs.si
Public Agency of the RS of Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments www.japti.si
Ljubljana Stock Exchange www.ljse.si
Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia www.stat.si
State Portal of the Republic of Slovenia e-uprava.gov.si

SINFO is printed on the eco-friendly FSC label paper. The FSC label provides assurance, that paper originates from responsible forest management according to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standards.



Darijan Košir
Photo Shutterstock

Yet the government had no choice: stabilising the public finances is vital and unavoidable, and also the only basis on which future economic growth can be built.

LIKE MOST OF ITS EUROPEAN COUNTERPARTS, BEFORE THE BEGINNING OF NEXT YEAR the Slovenian government has to make major incursions into public finances and their stabilisation. The amendments to the 2011 budget and the new 2012 budget which the Slovenian government has placed before parliament represent large cuts in central government spending. These measures were essential and unavoidable for Slovenia, although as elsewhere in Europe they have sometimes met with incomprehension. Yet the government had no choice: stabilising the public finances is vital and unavoidable, and also the only basis on which future economic growth can be built.

After the outbreak of the financial and economic crisis in 2008-2010 – the deepest global crisis since the Second World War – Slovenia found itself in a similar position to other economically developed countries: at almost ten per cent the fall in gross domestic product was very deep, and was mirrored by a systemic crisis in banking and hence also the broader economy. This required enormous amounts of money all at once to rehabilitate, protect against collapse or save economic players. After providing guarantees to the banks, governments decided to rescue the financial and real economy through cash injections that primarily came from central government borrowing on foreign markets. This used up budget funds that also had to cover aid and social transfers, which in turn led to a major budget deficit: in 2010 it reached approximately 5.5% of GDP or 1.85 billion euros (Slovenia's GDP stands at around 37 billion euros). At the same time Slovenia's public debt increased, doubling in fact over the past three years to today's figure of 42% of GDP. Continuing to borrow at this rate would place Slovenia alongside the European countries most notoriously affected by debt (Greece, Portugal, Italy, Spain, Ireland and the UK), and what happens when a state verges on collapse or even bankruptcy due to excess public debt and budget deficits

was seen this year with Greece. In brief, Slovenia's borrowing patterns were excessive, and although they were the result of urgent intervention to support the economy, the government was forced to slam on the brakes.

The 2011 and 2012 budgets therefore pursue the goal of stabilising public finance as quickly as possible, which will provide a genuine foundation for renewed economic growth in Slovenia. The budget deficit anticipated for 2011 is 4.5% of BDP, but for 2012 it is just 3.6% of GDP, while in 2013 Slovenia will have to reduce its budget deficit to 3% of GDP in line with the Maastricht criteria. In monetary terms, this means reducing spending in steps of around 370 million euros or 1% of GDP per year – the state will have that much less to spend by compared to 2010. Austerity measures of this kind are naturally always extremely painful.

The Slovenian government introduced a number of innovations to ease the budget picture in 2011: first, a set of fiscal rules constituting a formula that only permits budget spending to be increased in line with gross domestic product – in other words, only spending what we make, which means that the 2011 budget of 10.03 billion euros will be just 200 million euros more than in 2010; over that level actual budget spending has been restricted, due also to efforts to reduce the deficit. Second, the government also restricted spending through a programmed budget, which means ministries can no longer finance their traditional spending plans, but only programmed work and even then only according to prioritised lists. In other words, they can only acquire budget funds for urgent programmes, while spending on less urgent areas will have to be cut back or even cancelled.

The most important and most difficult step was a third new feature, which will save Slovenian public finances in the long term. This entailed the government significantly

restricting growth in spending on the biggest items in the 2011 and 2012 budgets: public sector pay, pension funds and social transfers. For example: the government maintained spending on public sector pay at 3.8 billion euros. If it had not taken this measure it would have risen to 4.5 billion euros by 2012, a difference of 700 million euros or 2% of GDP. Expressed in other terms, if these restrictions had not been put in place then the budget deficit would have reached approximately 6.5% of GDP by 2013. Allowing this trend to continue would have seen Slovenia exceeding the Maastricht threshold on public debt (60% of GDP), which along with an excess budget deficit would have led to the European Union (and probably also the IMF) imposing severe sanctions on Slovenia.

The 2011 and 2012 budgets are therefore not based on higher taxation, but on cutting public spending and therefore reducing the burden on the real economy, which is their greatest strength, despite criticism that they are on the right track, but not ambitious enough.

Of course, restrictions on public sector pay, pensions and social transfers have brought trade unions onto streets throughout Europe in protest, and Slovenia has been no exception. Intervention on pay – although in the Slovenian case this entailed a pay freeze rather than any reductions – is always painful. Part of the public sector trade union had faith in the government measures and signed the agreement on the pay freeze, while the other trade union group called a ten-

day strike, though fortunately they ended it before it had any major consequences. The trade unions finally accepted the reality of the public finance position, pressured from the government's steadfastness, as well as the incomprehension expressed by the public, particularly people in the private sector, which has had to respond to the crisis with measures as severe as reducing employee pay or benefits by up to ten per cent. The restrictions on growth in pensions will require some political movements in parliament, particularly given the power of the pensioner party, Desus, which is part of the ruling coalition. Without them it will be very difficult to adopt the budget, yet pensioners recognise that they have to share the fate that everyone else in the country faces. A vital part of the pension issue for the government has been the ongoing reforms to pension legislation that will restrict pension spending in the long term by making people work longer (raising the retirement age to 65 years, as at present Slovenians are among the youngest pensioners in Europe). When the reform of health system spending is brought in next spring, the public finances will have been stabilised and will no longer be a hindrance to increasing the competitiveness of the Slovenian private sector, which is the sector that contributes most to the budget.

That is where the essence of stabilising public finances lies: the continued growth of public spending would only be possible through new borrowing or even higher taxes. The 2011 and 2012 budgets are therefore not based on higher taxation, but on cutting public spending and therefore reducing the burden on the real economy, which is their greatest strength, despite criticism that they are on the right track, but not ambitious enough. This will offer Slovenian companies the chance of a new progress as the global economy struggles to recover. The less burdened they are by taxes, the easier it will be for them to create new value and further strengthen the entire Slovenian economy and society. ●



‘THE WORLD IS FOUNDED ON YOUNG PEOPLE...’

Mateja Malnar Štembal Photo STA, Shutterstock

Or at least so goes the saying in Slovenian. But this world is dwindling each year. The fact is, owing to the trend of population ageing, the number of young people is slowly but inexorably falling.

According to United Nations estimates, every fifth inhabitant of Earth is young: young people are all those aged from 15 to 24 years old (although statistics extend this period to 15 – 29 years). At the end of 2009 some 12.5% of the population of EU-27 were “young”, but this proportion is expected to fall to 10% by 2060.

In Slovenia, too, we are facing a trend of fewer and fewer young people and more and more old people. In 2006 young people (15-29 years) accounted for over a fifth of Slovenia’s population, then according to the middle variant of the EUROPOP2008 population projection, the proportion of young people amounted to less than a fifth, and in the next 20 years their proportion should drop to 15 percent.

Between the end of 2008 and the end of 2009 the number

of young people in Slovenia fell by more than 5,000, meaning their share of the entire population dropped by 0.4 percentage points.

Nevertheless, like many European countries, Slovenia is aware that young people are an important human resource for development, and they represent a key resource for social change and new ideas. Numerous factors, however, still stand in the way of this potential actually being exploited to the full extent.

Particularly at times of economic and financial crisis, young people are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. According to Eurostat data, unemployment among young people in the EU stood at 20.5% in May 2010, and in Slovenia (data for March 2010)

unemployment among young people amounted to 12.8%.

Meanwhile research indicates that young people today expect from work what they expect from their free time – exciting work, work that will give sense to their lives and work that will develop their creativity.

‘Particularly at times of economic and financial crisis, young people are one of the most vulnerable groups in society.’

Slovenian President Dr Danilo Türk, national ambassador for the International Year of Youth

We all expect young people to be the future drivers of development, new ideas and fundamental change in the years to come. It seems to me entirely understandable and acceptable for young people to expect the kind of circumstances and conditions that will allow them to get involved in decision-making and to understand intergenerational ties. In order for these expectations to be fulfilled, we need to do more to provide adequate training and jobs, along with the right kind of work. In other words, work that will carry a great deal of added value and that will ensure a solid basis for economic growth and improvement of the standard of living for all people. The issue of intergenerational solidarity belongs in this context, too. The United Nations has declared the International Year of Youth primarily with the intention of increasing young people’s participation in all parts of society. The purpose of this year is to develop partnerships with young people and facilitate for them a dialogue, both with state institutions as part of the civil society, and in politics. I accepted with all due responsibility and happiness the initiative of the Youth Council of Slovenia to serve as the national ambassador for the Year of Youth. As the head of state and national ambassador, together with young people I will strive to ensure that their future is better and more creative.



Reception of Slovenian President Dr Danilo Türk on the 10th anniversary of the Z glavo na zabavo [Using your head for fun Foundation].

As young people themselves recognise, the young generation is facing problems mainly of an existential nature – seeking jobs, gaining independence from parents, flat hunting and starting a family. In fact they are caught up in a kind of vicious circle from which they cannot escape on their own.

Nevertheless it is worth pointing out that each year the Slovenian Youth Office co-finances youth organisations of varying status, national youth organisations, youth centres, local community youth councils and non-governmental organisations working with youth. In the public call for co-financing youth work in 2010, there were successful tenders from 57 youth centres, 12 local community youth councils, 12 national youth organisations and 75 non-governmental organisations, and the government allocated EUR 1.42 million for co-financing youth work.

There is probably no country in the world that does not realise the need to renew dialogue between those shaping society today and those that will shape it in the future, and in some way revive intergenerational solidarity. And while the state can provide adequate support for this, most can in fact be done by young people themselves.

There is a predominant view in professional circles that first and foremost, young people actually lack a kind of revolutionary quality, which for instance was much more pronounced in the ‘60s.

Experts at the Slovenian Pedagogical Institute have also observed a shift in the focus of value orientations among young people towards friendships, working within small groups, privacy and not so much getting involved in social organisations and institutions through which they might fulfil universal values relating to humankind in general.

A survey was recently conducted at the Institute concerning the functioning of young people in society, and this showed that they list as their main problems those linked to violence, drugs, employment and education, while lowest on the list came problems relating to general culture (the media, public gathering, socialising).



One organisation that has been an advocate and promoter of young people now for 20 years is the Youth Council of Slovenia, an umbrella association of youth organisations that operate on the national level. National Youth Council of Slovenia sees the key problem for young people as being their inability to gain independence, since only an independent person can fully assume responsibility for their own future, fulfil their personal goals and at the same time fulfil their role in society as a responsible citizen. The inability to gain independence is directly linked in particular to the area of education, employment and the housing issue.

National Youth Council of Slovenia is also a driving force behind preparations for events and actions that will take place as part of the International Year of Youth.

The United Nations set the International Year of Youth to start on 12 August 2010, and through the Year of Youth they are seeking to encourage the energy, imagination and initiative of the world's young people in overcoming the obstacles faced by humanity: from achieving peace in the world to renewed economic development. The UN passed a special resolution calling on governments, the civil society, individuals and communities around the world to join this event by supporting activities both on the local and international levels.

'As young people themselves recognise, the young generation is facing problems mainly of an existential nature – seeking jobs, gaining independence from parents, flat hunting and starting a family. In fact they are caught up in a kind of vicious circle from which they cannot escape on their own.'

The main theme of the year is “Dialogue and Mutual Understanding”, and through this it is seeking to promote dialogue and understanding between generations and to foster the ideals of peace, respect of human rights and freedoms and solidarity. The year should serve to encourage young people to work for progress, which relates also to the UN's Millennium Development Goals, which should serve to alleviate social problems around the world: from extreme poverty and hunger to maternal and infant mortality and access to education and health.

In Slovenia the International Year of Youth will be conducted under the slogan Our Year Our Voice, and will include activities that are otherwise already being carried out, with special emphasis on the International Year of Youth and also relating to the European Year of Voluntary Activities Promoting Active Citizenship, which will also be directed towards encouraging volunteerism among young people.

It is also worth noting that this year will also be marked by the adoption of the first national youth programme. ●

For more information please visit:

- www.letomladih.si
- www.mss.si



LJUBLJANA HAS ITS OWN GRAPEVINE

Dušan Brejc Photo P&F Jeruzalem Ormož, VK Goriška Brda

LJUBLJANA CASTLE BOASTS ONE SINGLE GRAPEVINE, THE ten-year-old progeny of the oldest vine in the world, a žametovka (Kölner Blau or Schiava Grossa) that has stood alone for more than 400 years in Maribor's Lent district. The capital city's castle vine is under the care of the Convent of St. Urban and the Mayor, symbolically confirming that Ljubljana, too, is a city of vine and wine. A few years ago the city was awarded special recognition from the International Organisation of Vine and Wine (OIV) in Paris for the development of the wine trade and culture. Some unknown catastrophe almost took the city's darling vine away, and for this reason all we have asked in the last two years is that it can be allowed to survive. But the vine is resilient and enduring, so last year it produced blossoms once again. This year the harvest was not exactly abundant. Just 4,100 grams of grapes were harvested by the distinguished pickers, which is half of the usual weight, but for that reason, says the cellarman, the quality will be superlative. Finally the Agricultural Institute of Slovenia, which has taken on the honourable task of production, will fill six or possibly even seven small 375 ml bottles of the venerable wine. Most of it will find its way to the Convent archives, but some will be served by the Mayor to select guests.

Ljubljana can in fact boast a lively wine trade that dates back a long time. Today in the suburban municipality of Šiška, which opens up towards Gorenjska on the north of the city, you might

still find the vaulted cellars of wine traders that were operating up to the First World War, transporting wine from all the wine producing regions into the city by roads, trails and rivers, for the local people were always in favour of a sociable drop. An “eighth” (125 ml) of the dark red stuff was the proper measure for a man, who would take a glass of wine with the intention of relaxing or maybe sharpening his wits. Even today in Britain bars will serve wine in a “small snifter” wine glass, which is actually an eighth of a litre. In Slovenia, the measurements have got lost in the decimal system of the decilitre, something all wine bars and restaurants are now familiar with serving.

Vintage 2010

Since 1990 we have had pretty much impeccable vintages. The ten years leading up to 2000 are actually known as the golden decade. In effect there has been no acidic vintage for twenty years, although some might merit a sharp comment or two. And as winegrowers we almost got spoiled, since the quality pyramid of our wines has grown steeply. The 1997 vintage throughout Europe was criticised for its poorly defined aroma, while 2003 and 2006 were described as drought-ridden but exceptional, although the early harvest in the middle of August came as a big surprise, and perhaps for that reason the strong wines lacked their characteristic varietal aroma. In the last few years, however, harvests have been smaller than usual, while in some areas localised hail showed its teeth and

'More than 85% of exports are generated by the three biggest cellars (Goriška Brda, Ormož and Vipava) in three target markets (Bosnia, Croatia and the USA).'



reduced the yield further. This year, too, was not so lucky in the quantity of grapes, which was pruned back by some bad weather. The early varieties withstood it better than the late ones. Chardonnay, Pinot Gris and Sauvignon retained their outstanding primary aroma, which is reminiscent of grapes, while Laški Rizling (Welschriesling) and Riesling and the internationally sold Šipon (Furmint) will offer more in terms of secondary aromas, which derive from fermentation. For all of us moderate but unequivocally regular drinkers, the most important thing to recognise is that we trust our own tastes and we do not heed unduly the fickle predictions of future wine quality: only when the wine is in the glass in front of us will a decision be made on its goodness. It is only fair to say that in the best years you can find indifferent wines, and outstanding wines even in poor years. This is the case because certain well-known and generally excellent geographical positions (in Slovenia we call them "absolutes") will, with the propitious hand of the grower, always yield consistent quality. In Slovenia the industrial concept of "winemaking" does not exist, we speak only of "winegrowing". In the best possible case, agriculture is just a "factory under a clement or inclement sky".

Promising wine exports

In the past three years the volume of exports has grown sharply. This is something quite extraordinary, since we also suffered a beating from the international crisis.

Nevertheless, in 2009 exports rose by 19% over the previous year, and for some wine types the average price even grew. Of course this was no random event. In 2003, with the help of "flying oenologists", the major cellars significantly changed the style of their wines, rendering them internationally comparable. More

than 85% of exports are generated by the three biggest cellars (Goriška Brda, Ormož and Vipava) in three target markets (Bosnia, Croatia and the USA). The rest is accounted for by a range of smaller but exceptional family winegrowers. Total exports are still modest, at just over 6% (or 6 million litres) of total production. Slovenian wines are offered in as many as 53 countries, to which this year we added Mexico, Brazil and Kosovo. The majority of wines are exported to third countries, while our imports, from a full 25 countries, are dominated by EU countries. We can say without any hesitation that Slovenia's strong point is white wines, rather than reds. Around 70% of the country's vineyards grow white varieties.

The international market

A few ground rules need to be observed in successful international marketing. Consistent quality of the wine, almost regardless of the vintage, is essential in the middle price bracket. Quality alone no longer sells, and is becoming just a foot in the door towards being involved in any marketing presentation. More important is

'More important is the style that pertains to a given market, and this is defined by a distinctly pure varietal aroma, a full-bodied quality and freshness, as well as a harmony of fragrance and flavour, and all of these together make up an attractive wine that merits international marketing.'

the style that pertains to a given market, and this is defined by a distinctly pure varietal aroma, a full-bodied quality and freshness, as well as a harmony of fragrance and flavour, and all of these together make up an attractive wine that merits international marketing. Meanwhile origin, variety and brand are the cornerstones. In recent years origin has related mainly to the country, unless it involves a universally known winegrowing region such as Champagne. Varieties are fashionable in terms of trends that last several years. Chardonnay and Cabernet Sauvignon are still the leading varieties, although others are showing higher growth rates. Slovenian Pinot Gris and

Sauvignon have already won the attention of international buyers and Šipon is trading well in the UK, while Malvasia, Rebula and Laški Rizling are now just waiting their turn to be fashionable wines. Riding over all this in importance, however, is the brand, which can outweigh both the variety and origin, if it has a sufficiently convincing originality.

Are we leaders or followers?

It would be naïve to think that selling wine in the international market is easier than at home. When Slovenia becomes a wine destination, meaning that it has made it onto the international map and calendar of notable wine events, the path will be open for steady sales. For the moment we can say with some certainty that we are virtually non-existent in the international market, and that we have neither a distinctly good nor bad standing. And this fact in itself is by no means bad. Many buyers would not even be able to tell you where our country is, let alone list off our wines. And given the diffuse nature of the exports, it is no wonder that they do not know us. So our primary task will be to focus on and create a corporate marketing strategy in the major markets. In the UK and Germany, the two biggest import markets in the world, we are already on the list of respected wine traders, assuring us professionally impeccable support and a long-term orientation. The agent is our ally and partner. Together we are trying to demonstrate our natural features and comparative advantages. May the best wine win!

Sustainable development and new wine categories

Despite the fact that after five years of research in the EU we have not been able to define organic wine, this still does not mean that awareness of the importance of nature- and people-friendly grape and wine growing has stalled. We could say, rather, that this is just a kind of time-out, a buying of time that will serve to clarify things further. Just under half of Slovenia's vineyards are involved in integrated grape production, which means simply that the vine

Once again this year Robert Gorjak of the Belvin Wine School has prepared a new edition of the Wine Guide. The 2011 guide contains a comprehensive review of the previous year's production, naturally with a focus on quality wines. All the wines described and rated in the guide are also available to buy. The guide contains descriptions and ratings of over 500 wines placed on the market this year by Slovenian winemakers. All the samples have of course been tasted. This edition of the guide also includes reviews of wines made by Slovenian winemakers beyond the borders of Slovenia - on the Italian side of the Karst (Carso) plateau and in the hills of the Collio region. The author describes wines from the Štajerska region as representing excellent value for money, and speaks particularly highly of young wines from the current year's production. He rates the quality of wines from the Primorska region as outstanding.

more information at: www.vinskivodic.si

growers are aware of the importance of this subject. The organic and biodynamic production of a handful of certified growers also indicates that ecological awareness among vine cultivators is increasing. We are seeing the appearance of what are called macerated white wines, which make use of the old methods of production employed by our early ancestors. Even the production of wines in amphoras has new-found backing here in Slovenia. The desire for differentiation is relentlessly driving winegrowers to ever-new attempts to benefit the spoiled domestic and foreign markets, which expect continuous improvements in quality.

When we ask ourselves what it is that Slovenia should contribute to the treasury of European and world wines, there is no cause for doubt. A two-thousand-year tradition has defined our position. In addition to the native (Zelen, Pinela) and localised varieties (Laški Rizling, Šipon, Rebula, Malvasia and Refošk), which maintain an irreplaceable genome, our contribution will be seen in the constant efforts by vine cultivators and winegrowers, who are distinguished by their mission to find constant inspiration for new styles of wine in the incessantly reworked soil of Slovenia. •

Vital statistics of Slovenian wine:

- 22,500 ha
- 80 - 100 million litres of wine produced annually (around a tenth of what Germany produces)
- 3 regions, 9 districts
- 27,000 vineyards, but only 400 covering more than 5 ha
- 37 winegrowing municipalities
- 6 million litres of exports to 53 countries
- 6.5 million litres of imports from 25 countries
- 53 wine varieties,
- 70% of wine produced is white, 30% red,
- Welschriesling is the most widespread variety, with a 16% share of surface area
- Cviček and Teran are two original wine specialities
- 66% of vineyards are on terraces

“If something is good and different, it will sell.”

ZDRAVKO POČIVALŠEK

The Manager Association has named Terme Olimia director Zdravko Počivalšek this year's Manager of the Year.

Vesna Žarkovič Photo Mateja Jordovič Potočnik

FIGURES SHOW THAT TERME Olimia has tripled its revenue in ten years. Last year saw revenue of €15.9 million, with the group as a whole exceeding €21 million. In this period the number of overnight stays grew by 40%, which is 25% higher than the average for the sector. Added value per employee exceeded €43,000 last year, which is significantly higher than the sector average of €32,400.

This year, despite the fact that operating conditions are more difficult than last year, and given the delayed effect of the crisis in the tourism sector, you are expecting better results than last year, which means a profit of €1.3 million. Does this mean that the Terme Olimia group, which expects revenues of €23 million this year, has avoided the crisis?

It is true that we are not yet feeling the crisis in tourism, but we are aware that we will experience it with a delay. It is only this year that the effects of conditions in the economy last year are apparent. I am referring of course to conditions in the Slovenian market. With regard to other countries, we have the advantage that conditions are improving in the markets that are important to us, and in terms of content and price we are even more relevant to foreign guests during a crisis. It is, however, true that guests are demanding more and more

for the same price, and that is why we are constantly supplementing the services we offer. Payment difficulties mainly appear in the lower and middle price brackets and are less common in the higher price bracket. One thing is certain: if something is good and different, it will sell. Be that as it may, we are endeavouring to attract more foreign guests. In the current conditions, they can help us a great deal. Our foreign guests are mainly Italians, Austrians, Germans, Croatians and guests from eastern Europe. Recently we have also been getting more guests from Serbia, particularly since the elimination of visa requirements. So, the way we are

“IT IS, HOWEVER, TRUE THAT GUESTS ARE DEMANDING MORE AND MORE FOR THE SAME PRICE, AND THAT IS WHY WE ARE CONSTANTLY SUPPLEMENTING THE SERVICES WE OFFER.”

surviving the crisis is by increasingly orienting our sales abroad, because we believe that with a larger number of foreign guests we can compensate for two shortfalls: the crisis and the fact that there are not enough of us Slovenians. We all have new tourist capacities and Slovenians, who are still our best guests, are increasingly tending to go abroad. The result is that in objective

terms the number of domestic guests is decreasing. This forces us to concentrate more on foreign markets.

How are you supplementing the services you offer?

We began by changing the name from Atomske Toplice to Terme Olimia and are continuing by developing ties with nature, health and the tradition of the local environment. We differ from other spas in Slovenia, all of which offer very good health resort and thermal spa services, in that we are more closely tied to our environment, to the tourism potentials offered by the villages of the surrounding area, which means that our guests have something to do between meals and in the evening. We place a lot of importance on entertainment and having numerous entertainment options – this is our 'software' – where we make an effort to be different and original.

The Manager Association award is an important accolade. What does it mean to you?

Above all, recognition for everything I have done, not only this year, but in past years too. The award represents the recognition of 10 years of work at the spa, because we have done a great deal in the sense of raising our profile at home and abroad and grown into one of the leading providers of health resort services. »





Alongside your other accolades, in 2005 you received an award from the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia for outstanding business achievements.

Over the course of my career I have been involved in the financial restructuring of the Šmarje pri Jelšah Agricultural Combine, the founding of the Šmarje pri Jelšah Agricultural Cooperative, and, from 1993 to 1999, the restructuring of dairy company Mlekarna Celeia. In the last 11 years we have succeeded in making Terme Olimia recognisable and successful, not only in Slovenia but also beyond. The crowning achievement has been the spa's cooperation with the municipality of Podčetrtek, which has invested a great deal in local infrastructure. The inhabitants of Olimje have got involved in tourism in a magnificent way, with many local points of interest. By the way: in 2009 Olimje became the first place in Slovenia to receive an Entente Florale gold medal in the best-kept villages category.

When you took over Atomske Toplice in 1999 you began

“ WE DIFFER FROM OTHER SPAS IN SLOVENIA, ALL OF WHICH OFFER VERY GOOD HEALTH RESORT AND THERMAL SPA SERVICES, IN THAT WE ARE MORE CLOSELY TIED TO OUR ENVIRONMENT, TO THE TOURISM POTENTIALS OFFERED BY THE VILLAGES OF THE SURROUNDING AREA, WHICH MEANS THAT OUR GUESTS HAVE SOMETHING TO DO BETWEEN MEALS AND IN THE EVENING. ”

by carrying out a financial restructuring of the company. At the same time you created a new brand name, Terme Olimia.

The group, which comprises three companies – Terme Olimia, Terme Tuhelj and Terme Olimia Bazeni – employs 400 people, 250 of them in Slovenia. Investment in human resources and capacities has enabled us to develop more demanding services and move up the value chain. The figures show that Terme Olimia has tripled its revenue in ten years. Last year we generated revenue of €15.9 million, while the group

as a whole exceeded €21 million. In this period the number of overnight stays grew by 40%, which is 25% higher than the average for the sector. Added value per employee exceeded €43,000 last year, which is significantly higher than the sector average of €32,400.

What is the strategy of the company built on?

On our connection with the environment. Promoting and investing in development of the locality was one of the factors that contributed to Olimje winning the gold medal last year. We encountered some marketing difficulties as a result of the previous name of Atomske Toplice ['Atomic Spa'], because we were no longer able to explain that our water is no more or less radioactive than the water of other spas. We chose one of the medieval names of the local monastery as our new name, because we feel that it is our job to connect with the tradition of the environment, and also because the name is recognisable abroad, easy to pronounce and commercially successful.

In order to realise your vision, you have set yourself the goal

of becoming the best spa in the area between the Alps, the Adriatic and the Danube.

That is correct. This is the area that we operate in. The bulk of our guests live within a 500-kilometre radius of the spa, but we also wish to attract guests arriving by air from further afield. By purchasing Terme Tuhelj the company has expanded into the Croatian market. Negotiations are also under way with the Serbian government over the construction of a hotel-spa complex in Serbia. We are focusing increasingly on guests from western and northern Europe and Russia. The elimination of visa requirements has made this an interesting market for Serbians, who are currently in fifth place in terms of guest numbers. I should emphasise that we need to be better organised: at the moment there is too little coordination and interconnection, so results are not as good as they could be. We need to work together more closely under the umbrella of the Slovenian Tourist Board.

You recently visited Armenia. Did you sign any new deals there?

Presidential visits are always more successful when it comes to concluding deals, because in this way it is easier to make the right contacts. We established important contacts in Armenia and had discussions about the transfer of know-how and about several thermal water sources that are as yet undeveloped. In Cyprus we mainly discussed the health resort aspects of our business.

What investments have you planned for 2010?

The development cycle of investments is now complete. The hotel side of the business will be complemented by new content. The water park will shortly be getting a new children's area and we are also thinking about other ways of managing overnight stays in structures on the campsite, where we want to further develop services. We are also getting ready to build a new hotel at Terme Tuhelj and are in the process of

putting together a financing package. We are hoping to start work before the end of this year or in early 2011. The new hotel will have 120 double rooms at the four-star level, a conference centre with a capacity of 250, and a parking garage with space for 50 cars.

What about Macedonia, where you were planning to build a spa-entertainment complex in Gevgelija?

We have already worked out the basics of this project but the investment is currently on hold because of conditions in Greece.

How are the discussions about an investment in Vojvodina progressing?

We are talking directly to the Serbian government about building a hotel-spa complex modelled on Terme Olimia in Palić, near Subotica in Vojvodina. The plan envisages a 150-room hotel with its own wellness centre consisting of a pool and sauna complex. We see this development as potentially interesting because this is a large market with an established spa tourism culture. The talks are now in the final phase. The Serbian government published a call for

“ WE ARE OBSESSED WITH BEING A BIT DIFFERENT FROM THE OTHERS. ”

tenders in August. We submitted a bid and were selected, and we are currently discussing strategic cooperation and the signing of an agreement to set up a joint venture between Terme Olimia and the Republic of Serbia. Our share in this company would be 80%, while the Serbian share would be 20%. The Republic of Serbia would either enter the joint venture directly or via a company called Park Palić.

Speaking optimistically, when do you expect this development to start?

The expectation of the Serbian government is that the first phase of the development will end on 1 May 2012,

while the second phase needs to be completed by October 2012. The value of the investment has not yet been finally defined, but I expect it to exceed €20 million.

What about competition in Slovenia. Where does your advantage lie?

We are obsessed with being a bit different from the others. We look for points through which we can identify with the environment, and within the spa and health resort sector as a whole we differ from others by being the most involved in our immediate environment. Slovenia has 14 spas, all of which are successful and which together generate more than a third of overnight stays in Slovenia and just under 40% of tourist traffic. Spas represent the most successful sector of Slovenian tourism, a sector which works well and, fortunately, is not seasonal. We host approximately 1,000 people per day, which makes us a serious commercial entity in the surrounding area. We are, however, slightly limited by poor communications, since we are a long way from the motorway.

Another spa is due to open in Rimske Toplice. What does this mean for you?

We welcome every new initiative, and it does not affect us in the slightest.

Mr Počivalšek, what is it that currently occupies the greatest part of your working day?

I would have to say current operations, which includes constant communication and keeping an eye on things, making sure that services are at a high level, responding to the needs and wishes of guests. I also spend a lot of time on our range of products and services, which we are constantly trying to develop. The architecture of our buildings and the numerous awards we have won for them are not enough on their own. The essence of success lies in knowing how to sell our services. This is what all of us give most weight to: making sure that we stay on our toes.

FIRST TRAIN OF THE CARGO 10 ALLIANCE

According to forecasts from the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, Slovenia is expected to achieve economic growth of 0.9% this year, with predicted inflation of 1.1%.

Vesna Bertonec Popit, Delo Photo STA



FOLLOWING HEAVY RAINFALL, SLOVENIA WAS HIT BY extensive flooding which did not even spare the capital. As well as private houses and the basements of apartment buildings, several businesses were badly affected. Farmland also suffered, with unharvested crops destroyed, while damage to infrastructure was exacerbated by numerous landslides. Some government estimates suggest that given the scale of the damage, Slovenia could even ask the European Union for help.

With the recent floods, which this time spared Železniki and its surrounding area, flooded two years ago, came sharp criticisms of the country's most recent environment ministers, accused of doing too little to regulate watercourses. There have also been criticisms of constructors who have deliberately chosen to build in flood risk areas, constructing on land that is supposed to serve for drainage, and the fact that municipalities have granted permits for this.

Following a negative end to this year's tourist season as a result of the economic crisis, the August rains and the September floods, in a year in which the national statistics office also counted a smaller number of visitors and fewer overnight stays even in August, i.e. at the height of the season, Slovenia was also struck by a wave of strikes in September. The strikes involved public sector workers, who spent three years negotiating with the Ministry of Public Administration over pay and promotion during the last government, when the economy was booming. The current government, faced with significantly different economic conditions cannot afford further pay increases for public sector employees although it is aware that in past years these workers have for similar reasons relinquished agreed pay rises on several

occasions. The strike in the public sector was outwardly most visible at national borders, where lorries were forced to queue for eight or even ten hours, and the queue on the Croatian side of the border reached almost to Zagreb.

The fact is, however, that the Slovenian public has never been so critical of a strike by one specific sector of Slovenian society. Given the great difficulties, including unemployment and very low wages, currently faced by the majority of employees in the private sector, who are struggling to make ends meet, the demands of the significantly better paid public sector, where even during the crisis jobs were not at risk, and where even this year the number of workers has increased by more than a thousand, seemed unjustified.

Dr Jože Mencinger of the Economics Institute at the University of Ljubljana's Law Faculty (and a former rector of the University of Ljubljana) defended the public sector in an article in *Gospodarska gibanja*, which is published by the Economics Institute, on the grounds that it is the largest enterprise in Slovenia and one which we encounter regularly and frequently from the cradle to the grave. He also pointed out that the public sector in Slovenia is entirely comparable to the share of the public sector in the European Union and that it does not differ from European practice in terms of either size or pay.

Following lengthy negotiations with the public sector, including some negotiations led by Prime Minister Borut Pahor, the public sector temporarily suspended the strike, although it will continue if the results of the negotiations are not satisfactory. The protests of the Slovenian public sector, which cost the economy two million euros a day in the week of the strike, actually coincided with the protests of the public sector in other countries.

The business enterprise sector has threatened to sue the public sector for damages, since, as a result of delays in deliveries, companies have risked losing hard-won orders that were supposed to help their recovery

from the crisis.

The government of the Republic of Slovenia has adopted a draft budget for the next two years. State revenue of 8.3 billion euros is forecast next year, while government spending is expected to amount to 10 billion euros. The budget deficit is thus estimated at 1.7 billion euros or 4.5% of GDP. This year the deficit is estimated at 5.5% of GDP, while in 2012 it should fall to 3.5% of GDP. In order to be able to reach these targets the government has frozen pensions and social transfers for two years – along with the pay of public

officials and civil servants. Without these measures, the public sector pensions and wages bill would amount to 4.5 billion euros in 2012. Following the introduction of the government measures, annual expenditure on public sector pay will be reduced by 720 million euros, while the pensions burden will be reduced by 320 million euros a year.

The number of employees in the public administration is expected to be reduced by 360. As a result of the cost-cutting measures, the share of public debt in GDP would increase to just over 42%. Without these measures, this share would increase to as much as 60%.

Igor Masten of the Faculty of Economics in Ljubljana has pointed out that the problem with Slovenia's deficit is not its size but the fact that it seems as though it is going to last for a longer period. If the stabilisation measures do not have a suitable effect in, say, two years, other measures will need to be adopted. Dr Jože Mencinger, on the other hand, emphasises that the Slovenian deficit is in line with the rest of Europe and by no means anomalous within the European Union. He adds that in the case of economic growth he would like to see a slightly smaller deficit than the 4.5% of GDP predicted for next year.

According to current forecasts, Slovenia should reach 3% economic growth in 2012, which would also allow the government to unfreeze public sector pay and probably also pensions, which have likewise been frozen.

The state and municipalities are also expected to receive more money in the future from property tax. This is a nettle which no government to date has dared grasp. The problem is that the national surveying authority, which carried out a property census two years ago, evidently approached the problem the wrong way and made numerous errors in the trial calculations of property values which were communicated to citizens and property owners, something which has caused considerable dissatisfaction among the population, who are afraid that they will be required to pay much higher taxes than they have paid to date, particularly since tax rates would henceforth be set by municipalities.

According to the estimates of the tax administration, taxpayers working with cash are evading around 130 million euros of VAT each year. The estimates of the Court of Auditors of the Republic of Slovenia put tax evasion considerably higher, at around 185 million euros. Tax administration controls in 2008 revealed violations in 50% of cases. Last year this figure was 37%, while this year's figure is 34%. A special government working group is currently preparing measures designed to put an end to tax evasion. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Affairs is drafting a special law to enable the more effective detection and prevention of illegal work.

In October one of the first Slovenian anti-crisis laws expired. This was a measure that subsidised full working time for companies, to avoid them having to lay off employees. Most of the subsidies went to the largest companies, with a total of 60,000 employees. Over the course of a year and a half, 35 million euros of subsidies were paid out. The companies involved consider that these subsidies, particularly at the start of the crisis when they were unable to guarantee full working time, have helped them considerably.

In May this year, the national railway operators of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina signed a cooperation agreement and established the Cargo 10 alliance. Some days ago, the transport ministers of these countries accompanied the first train from Batajnica in Serbia. The aim of the alliance is to ensure rapid and efficient goods transport. This joint cooperation should significantly reduce the time needed to transport goods by rail. The journey from Paraćin (in Serbia) to Sežana (on the Slovenian-Italian border) is expected to take ten hours less than



Jože Mencinger
Faculty of Law

previously. This will be achieved by removing operating obstacles and doing away with lengthy formalities at borders. Interest in joining the alliance has also been shown by the railway operators of Republika Srpska, Macedonia and Bulgaria.

Slovenian transport minister Patrik Vlačič emphasised that the Cargo 10 alliance is an example of cooperation between commercial organisations that realise that they are unable to

respond independently to the opportunities offered by the market. Although the Munich–Istanbul route is 900 kilometres longer, cargo traffic has not returned to Pan-European Corridor X, even since the re-establishing of traffic. We need to ask ourselves why this is, said Vlačič, who expects that the integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into the European Union will

finally eliminate border formalities. Last year two million tonnes of cargo were transported along Corridor X. Before the breakup of Yugoslavia, this figure was eight million tonnes.

Slovenian business clubs abroad have held a joint meeting for the first time. Last year these clubs, which are financed by the Public Agency for Enterprise and Foreign Investment (JAPTI) offered advice to almost 300 companies and organised 34 business events. JAPTI has financed 14 business clubs in other countries this year, compared to 11 last year. Research carried out by JAPTI shows that companies are satisfied with the way these clubs work, and they are gaining importance in the countries in which they operate, since one of the most important tasks of the clubs is to offer assistance with business contacts between Slovenian and foreign companies. This is also confirmed by the fact that the membership of some Slovenian business clubs, which also includes companies, has almost tripled in the last two years. ●

'According to forecasts from the Institute of Macroeconomic Analysis and Development, Slovenia is expected to achieve economic growth of 0.9% this year, with predicted inflation of 1.1%.'



DOKU ZAVGAEV

At the present time our relations are boosting

FIRST OF ALL LET ME EXPRESS MY GRATITUDE TO THE editors of your magazine for the opportunity to introduce “Sinfo” readers to the Russian vision of both the current conditions and prospects of Russian-Slovenian relations, with special mention of some of their priorities.

At the present time our relations are boosting. We have managed to establish an intimate dialogue, including at the highest political level: in less than a year four such meetings were held in Moscow (twice), Maribor and St. Petersburg. The first official visit of the President of Slovenia to Russia in the history of our bilateral diplomatic relations is scheduled for November of this year. I believe that this visit will provide a powerful political stimulus for our dialogue, while also ensuring that there are additional opportunities for enhancing cooperation in various spheres.

Russian-Slovenian relations are diverse and broad in range. I would like to highlight certain areas of interaction which are, in our opinion, among the most pertinent.

First and foremost is the issue of European security. We highly appreciate the positive attitude of our Slovenian partners to the initiative of the European Security Treaty, which was proposed by the President of the Russian Federation. We are convinced that the establishment of a legally binding security framework is a pressing issue for Europe. We will continue to further promote this initiative.

The second most important area, which is of utmost importance to us, is collaboration in the field of modernization. Its goals as far as Russia is concerned have been defined by President Dmitry Medvedev in his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation for 2010. In particular, he noted the following five main priorities: the development of medical equipment, technology and pharmaceuticals; the development of space and telecommunication systems; a radical increase in energy efficiency, the transition to a rational model of resource consumption; the use of bio resources, wide-spread in our country, for use in energy production; the development of strategic and information technology. We expect modernization issues to be among the key points in the agenda for our two presidents' meeting in the Kremlin on 17 November of this year.

For now, Russia is in the process of creating Skolkovo technology park – similar to America's well-known Silicon Valley. The project implies immense multi-billion euro investments in terms of infrastructure and human capital. We also see our Slovenian partners taking part in Skolkovo. This project, as well as other potential

“Russian valleys”, will require, along with foreign investments and knowledge, the involvement of highly qualified specialists. This is but another potential sphere for our mutual collaboration.

At the same time, we are continuing to expand our trade and economic cooperation. We hope that the Slovenian-Russian Business council, initiated by the Prime-ministers of the two countries, will contribute significantly to its promotion. We are very grateful to Slovenia for organizing various multilateral events, which are related to Russia, in its own territory. One such event is the Global Russia Business Meeting, which was held successfully in May of this year in Brdo pri Kranju, and hosted representatives from 27 states.

Traditionally, investment projects have been among our priorities. Production of pharmaceuticals, paint and coatings, and telecommunication activities organized by Slovenians in Russia are all operating effectively. My contacts with representatives from

“ TRADITIONALLY, INVESTMENT PROJECTS HAVE BEEN AMONG OUR PRIORITIES. ”

the business community of your country confirm that it is their intention to promote this important form of interaction. As we have seen in practice, it is this mutual penetration of economic systems – also at the level of small and

medium enterprises – that improves their respective market fluctuation tolerances, with respect to global economies.

We are satisfied with the fact that Slovenia attaches special attention to the development of Russian-EU dialogue in different scopes, particularly in the field of inter-human contacts, for which the existing visa regime poses a serious obstacle. We highly appreciate understanding and support of Slovenia and hope for decisive progress in this matter in the near future. We are also counting on a practical contribution from the Slovenian side for the prompt achievement of a relevant agreement.

The forthcoming opening of the Russian Scientific and Cultural Centre in Ljubljana (and a respective Slovenian centre in Moscow) is a major landmark in terms of the development of relations between various fields in the humanities. The “Russian House” will be located in the very centre of the city – at Ciril Metodov Square. Our country's friends will always be welcome there.

While developing dialogues between our countries in the most diverse of spheres, we have been satisfied that they have continued acquiring new concrete and practical content, are always up to date and, in our opinion, meet the vital interests of both our nations on the whole.

Doku Zavgaev - Ambassador of the Russian Federation in Slovenia



ADA FILIP SLIVNIK

Slovenia and Russia in the 21st century

TO DATE, POLITICAL RELATIONS BETWEEN SLOVENIA AND the Russian Federation could be labelled as traditionally good. Evidence of this can be seen in the regular political dialogue and meetings at the highest level. A number of meetings have been held in 2009 and 2010 between the presidents of Slovenia and Russia, Dr Danilo Türk and Dmitry Medvedev, and also between prime ministers Borut Pahor and Vladimir Putin, and these have underlined the high level of relations between the two countries. There is also regular political dialogue between the Slovenian and Russian foreign ministries, covering all the major world issues. A special trust has been forged between respective foreign ministers Žbogar and Lavrov in their many meetings. The November visit to Russia by Slovenian President Dr Türk and an economic delegation should open up new opportunities for mutual cooperation in numerous areas, and as such will represent a turning point in further mutual cooperation between the two countries.

The good all-round relations between the two countries have also been enhanced for many years now by the annual ceremony at the Russian Chapel below Vršič Pass, which is attended by senior political, church and military representatives from both countries. Meanwhile successful relations have been developed in the cultural sphere, with a new programme of cooperation being drawn up. This will provide a basis for the further development of relations in culture, education and science. Slovenia and Russia are also brought together by their membership in the Forum of Slavic Cultures, which is based in Ljubljana.

Economic cooperation between the two countries has been successful in past years, but unfortunately the world financial and economic crisis has done considerable damage to this good reciprocal economic performance. In 2009 trade also took a major fall. While the negative trend has now been halted, Slovenia is not keeping pace with the growing trade Russia enjoys with the rest of the world. Growth in investment and services is also still some way off the record year of 2008, with greater growth evident only in tourism.

The two countries also cooperate well on the multilateral level. Slovenia is a member state of the Euro-Atlantic integrations and belongs to the group of countries that are seeking to improve relations with the Russian Federation in all areas, something it strived for during Slovenia's Presidency of the EU and Council of Europe.

Although it might seem hard for mutual political cooperation to be further improved, in the future, when Slovenia celebrates the 20th anniversary of its independence, all attention will need to be focused on continued excellent mutual dialogue on the highest

level. There will also be a need to strengthen mutual cooperation in multilateral areas, especially in the UN.

This raises numerous questions. What does Russia represent today for the world and Slovenia, and what kind of market is Russia for us? Plus, on the other hand, how does Russia view Slovenia, what kind of partner are we for Russia and how can we enhance and improve our cooperation and get it ready for the 21st century?

Geographically Russia is a part of Europe, and is thus in our neighbourhood. In the multipolar world it is acquiring a new role, and it is helping to shape the new global reality in various regional connections. It is seeking new opportunities primarily in Asia, Latin America and Africa. It is an energy superpower. It is tied to Europe and thereby to Slovenia by various economic and political interests, especially relating to energy in the form of the North and South Streams. The South Stream project is one of the major economic projects for Slovenia, and here it is cooperating with the Russian Federation, but it should not remain at that.

An important thing for Slovenia is cooperation in the area of modernising the Russian Federation, which is one of President Medvedev's projects. The purpose of the modernisation is cooperation with global partners in improving the efficiency of the state, knowledge transfer and technological progress. It is important for Slovenia to be a partner to the Russian Federation in its efforts, and to be able to offer Russia the best it can in this area. There are major opportunities for Slovenian businesses to succeed here, since in many sectors they are at the global pinnacle of technological innovation. Russia, too, is aware of this. Intensive talks are underway about possible cooperation, and joint projects are being drawn up. This cooperation will provide new impetus to bilateral trade and especially to Slovenian investment. In the past ten years Russia has already changed a great deal, and it has stepped up the pace at which it is becoming a truly modern country in all respects and in all areas. Russia is a challenging market for Slovenian business people, since Slovenia is not the only country that has glimpsed the huge opportunities offered by the Russian market. The Russian market accepts only the best and the most patient, and although it has enormous potential, for foreign business interests the investment environment is still unfriendly and rigid. Through greater cooperation between Russia and foreign partners, including Slovenia, the picture here should start to change, too.

Ada Filip Slivnik - Ambassador of the Republic of Slovenia in the Russian Federation



SYMBOL OF SLOVENIAN-CROATIAN FRIENDSHIP ON VIEW AT THE NATIONAL GALLERY IN LJUBLJANA

Alenka Ivančič Photo Bojan Salaj, copyright National Gallery

After the Slovenian-Croatian exhibition “Kogoj-Fabijanić, the Quest for Aesthetic Utopia” in March this year in Croatia grew into an event of symbolic importance and exemplary – and welcome – intercultural cooperation, at the end of September it arrived as a visiting exhibition in Slovenia. From 28 September to 24 October it was on display at the National Gallery in Ljubljana.

THE EXHIBITION HAS COME AT probably the most interesting political moment as far as relations between Slovenia and Croatia are concerned,” said Darijan Košir, director of the Slovenian Government Communication Office, in his introductory speech, adding that “this is a time when on both sides we are now past the adoption of an arbitration agreement on the method of resolving the border dispute, which represented such a hindrance in the relations between our two countries for the two decades since independence. This exhibition in fact symbolises an upturn in these relations.”

The exhibition “Kogoj-Fabijanić, the Quest for Aesthetic Utopia” does not represent merely an insight into the creativity of two internationally acclaimed designers who have won numerous prizes and awards, but also tells a symbolic tale of the friendship and mutual respect of the two designers, who

have collaborated without interruption for 25 years now regardless of national borders, stereotypes and prejudices. Now the two are being presented for the first time to a Slovenian audience in a joint exhibition. The ambitious title of the exhibition symbolises the aspirations, excellence and creativity of the two nations, virtues of which Slovenians and Croatians are very proud.

Slovenian design legend Oskar Kogoj, who has ranged successfully between sculpture and industrial design, is an artist who links Slovenian mythology to the mythologies of other nations, and who explores and uncovers forgotten world knowledge. He is best known for his “nature in energy design”. He is being presented now through more than 200 artefacts made in various techniques and materials.

The Croatian architect and Zagreb Architecture Faculty professor Nenad Fabijanić is responsible for a range of architectural works and urban designs, as

well as numerous theatre and television set designs. In the National Gallery he presented models of his soft, organic-form stone benches made especially for the exhibition, and a selection of unique glass items. He is also the conceptual designer of the exhibition.

The exhibition was created on the initiative of Slovenia and its Government Communication Office, which headed this project in the desire to expand the familiarity of Slovenia and Croatia with the help of the two cultural ambassadors and drivers of intercultural dialogue, as well as of selected Croatian institutions.

Given the excellent response in Zagreb and Ljubljana, and since the Croatian and Slovenian sides see the exhibition as a symbol and reflection of friendship and the outstanding cooperation between the two countries, we are looking to stage the exhibition before long abroad, firstly in what would be for both sides a traditionally friendly country. ●

THE SLOVENIAN PAVILION AT EXPO 2010 CLOSES ITS DOORS AT THE END OF OCTOBER

Polona Jerina Photo Japti

AT THE END OF THIS MONTH, EXPO 2010, the world’s largest public exhibition, closes its doors. The event has already attracted well over 70 million visitors, a number which is certain to increase by a further few million before the end of the month, since visitor numbers have been constantly high.

While the Expo as a whole has been breaking records, the Slovenian pavilion has been extremely well attended. To date, the Slovenian pavilion has welcomed over 3 million visitors, which is already in excess of our expectations. The Slovenian presentation at the Expo has been marked by several notable events. The pavilion has hosted kurenti (traditional Carnival figures), representing Slovenian tradition, musicians have brought Slovenian melodies to China, to the delight of visitors to the pavilion, and cultural presentations have offered an insight into contemporary theatrical performance. The Slovenian tourism and business

sectors have also been represented. All these events have added variety both inside and outside the Slovenian pavilion and attracted many passers-by, bringing them closer to Slovenia.

Saša Lavrič, Slovenia’s Commissioner General for Expo 2010:

I am very happy with the concept of the Slovenian pavilion and delighted with its execution. The extremely high visitor numbers are a confirmation that we have made the right decisions, as is the praise we have received from the organisers. I would like to emphasise the fact that without the right team and good teamwork the project would not have been such a success, and I would therefore like to thank all those who have taken part in the Expo 2010 project, particularly those with whom I have worked closely in the pavilion. In the end it is people who conjure up a positive atmosphere and hospitality for visitors, so the decision to involve representatives of Slovenia has

proved to be more than successful.

We have given away a good number of souvenirs and prizes, and a great number of copies of Slavoj Žižek’s essay *The Time of the End of Time*, which was particularly appreciated by visitors. We have also received two awards for our wonderful team, which serve to confirm the excellent organisation of the Slovenian-Chinese team in the pavilion. The constant ranking of the Slovenian pavilion among the 10 most popular pavilions has been a continued confirmation that the pavilion has achieved its purpose, that of ‘standing out’ from the mass of pavilions and attracting the attention of visitors to Expo 2010.

You can still follow current events online at www.expo2010.si or take a virtual walk through the Slovenian pavilion, and in this way experience Expo 2010 for yourself.



A selection of interesting comments from Chinese visitors:

- Why are all the roofs in Slovenia red? (looking at photographs of Slovenia on the floor of the pavilion)
- Was this jewellery worn by Slovenian emperors? (referring to jewellery designed by Lara Bohinc)
- Why is the human fish called human?
- Can the human fish live here under the spotlights? (someone who thought that the replicas on display were alive)
- Can the human fish turn into a human being?
- Is the human fish a plant or animal?
- Is it poisonous?
- The human fish is like a crocodile!

THE NOVO MESTO SPRING – NINETY YEARS ON

Polona Prešeren Photo STA

IT ALL BEGAN NINE DECADES AGO, when Novo Mesto took its place in the European avant-garde. The story of Novo Mesto's cultural spring was written by a group of young artists: Anton Podbevšek, Marij Kogoj, Miran Jarc and others, with the support of the painter Rihard Jakopič, organised a day dedicated to the arts that transcended the artistic boundaries of the time.

The event made a very powerful impression on Novo Mesto, in those days still a small town. On 26 September 1920, under the patronage of Rihard Jakopič, already an established painter, young artists including Božidar Jakac, Marjan Mušič, Ivan Čargo and Zdenko Skalicky presented themselves to the public. The first two would leave an important mark on Slovenian art history. On the same day, the composer Marij Kogoj gave a concert at Kamen Castle and Zdenka Zikova of the Ljubljana Opera gave a recital. The Narodni Dom was the venue for a literary evening featuring the poets Anton Podbevšek and Miran Jarc.

The chief protagonists of the Novo Mesto Spring were all very influential in their chosen fields. Božidar Jakac was particularly notable in the field of the fine arts, even becoming a member of the European Academy of Arts. Marjan Mušič was a member of UNESCO's heritage



Rihard Jakopič,
Pod oknom
(1915)

protection committee. Anton Podbevšek was one of a prominent group of central European avant-garde poets based in Berlin, Vienna, Ljubljana and Budapest.

In view of the extraordinary artistic legacy of the Novo Mesto Spring of September 1920, artists working in Novo Mesto today decided to commemorate the events that took place nine decades ago. The result was a series of cultural and artistic events held in the capital of the Dolenjska region to mark the anniversary. The day began with a morning event devoted to theory, featuring prominent

theorists from Slovenia and abroad. This was followed by guided tours of places connected with the Novo Mesto Spring. The Simulaker Gallery hosted an exhibition of photographs by the noted Novo Mesto photographers Borut Peterlin, Bojan Radovič and Boštjan Pucelj, while the Dolenjska Museum hosted an exhibition by the Irwin group entitled State in Time. The main event of the day took place outside the Miran Jarc Library, Novo Mesto's main public library, and was directed by Matjaž Berger, the director of the Anton Podbevšek Theatre.

THIS YEAR'S VEČERNICA AWARD GOES TO WRITER BINA ŠTAMPE ŽMAVC

Mateja Malnar Štembal Photo STA

THE RECIPIENT OF THIS YEAR'S 'večernica', literally meaning 'evening star', a prize for children and youth literature awarded by the newspaper company Večer now for the 15th time, is

Bina Štampe Žmavc, for her book Cesar in roža, The Emperor and the Flower.

Bina Štampe Žmavc, who has already been nominated five times for a večernica, is a writer, poet, dramatist



Bina Štampe Žmavc
and Tomaž Ranc

and director who lives and works as a freelancer in Celje, and she is among the pioneers of children's post-modern improvisational theatre.

The writer won over the jury with her collection of fairy-tales that take the myth out of the fairy-tale element, and through the perspective of the child or a personified animal she manages to articulate important issues of the human world and children within it.

The themes in her fairy-tales show the insufficient sensitivity of adults to

a child-friendly world, but the author does not offer simplistic responses about happiness, indicating that the most important thing here is people's ethical standing and the mutual human relationships founded in that.

In the author's opinion, the duality and multi-layered quality of the whole book are nicely encapsulated in the title itself – it is in fact a fairy-tale about who is an emperor and who is a supreme aristocrat of the spirit, while the motif of the flower points to the fact that without

flowers, the world would be neither fragrant nor colourful.

On the presentation of the Večer prize, the recipient said that she was happy that after so many years of work, the 'evening star' had also finally shone its light for her. She feels the prizes have a purpose, because they are something along the way for poets, enabling them to keep up their strength, even though the path is tough, while at the same time the prize serves as a reminder to consumers of culture to take a slightly closer look at some works.

13th FESTIVAL OF SLOVENIAN FILM IN PORTOROŽ

Albert Kos Photo STA

FROM 1 TO 3 OCTOBER THE TOWN OF Portorož was the setting for the 13th Festival of Slovenian Film, the now traditional autumn cultural event in this seaside resort, devoted to looking over, evaluating and presenting awards for the greatest achievements of Slovenian filmmakers in the past year. The three-day festival programme involved the screening of 52 films chosen by festival selector Gorazd Trušnjevec, a film journalist and editor of the film magazine Ekran, with the greatest attention being grabbed by the seven full-length feature films, of which four were Slovenian and three co-productions.

Festival-goers were especially excited about seeing the film Piran – Pirano, scripted and directed by Goran Vojnovič, who also penned the novel Čefurji raus [Balkan Southerners Out], a top Slovenian bestseller of the past year or two. Like his novel, the film Piran – Pirano tackles multicultural topics related to the period after the Second World War, with an encounter between a former Italian resident of the seaside town of Piran, who was exiled from his birthplace and home after the Second World War, and a post-war Bosnian immigrant to Piran,

who later takes over the former's abandoned apartment. This is the starting point for an exposé of the complexity and conflicted nature of relations and relationships in an area that in recent history was exposed to major upheavals, which strongly marked the majority of people living there, as well as those who left and those who moved in.

The premiere of the film Piran – Pirano was scheduled to be screened outside as the opening event of the festival in Tartinijev trg, the central square in Piran, but bad weather forced the screening into the nearby Portorož Auditorium, which is the official venue for the entire festival each year. This film, featuring performances by a range of famous actors, earned Vojnovič the festival's 'Vesna' prize for best screenplay, with 'Vesna' prizes also going to the lead female actor Nina Ivanišin and film editor Janez Bricelj.

Meanwhile the biggest tally of festival prizes was garnered by the film Circus Fantasticus, directed by Janez Burger, which was declared by the festival jury the best film of the festival. Alongside this, the film's creators won prizes for



Vesna award

direction, make-up, sound, music and best supporting role. The head of the professional festival jury, director Boris Palčič, made a point of saying that this film left the deepest mark on the jury, especially owing to its view of the war, which is revealed in an interweaving of naturalism and a magical poetic quality.

The third film in the competition programme, Oča [Dad], directed by Vlado Škafar, received 'Vesnas' for photography, for special achievements and for best supporting role, while the 'Vesna' for best male performance went to actor Jurij Zmec in Miha Hočevar's youth film Gremo mi po svoje [Let's Go Our Own Way], which also won the audience vote for best film. There was also a noted prize



Jurij Zrnec



Nina Ivanišin



Gojmir Lešnjak

for Gojmir Lešnjak, for his performance in the short feature film *Trst je naš* [Trieste is Ours].

Despite the rather modest number of full-length feature films shown and some of their weaknesses, which were mainly technical and not so much artistic or aesthetic in nature, the jury's view was that this year's selection of Slovenian

film production was again on an enviable level, and in particular, as jury president Palčič stressed, it was exceptionally diverse, indicating the very different approaches employed by individual filmmakers in their projects.

As is traditional, the special five-member jury also announced the Metod Badjura Award for lifetime contribution

to Slovenian cinema, which went this year to director Filip Robar Dorin, who received the award at the opening ceremony from Slovenian President Danilo Türk, who together with Culture Minister Majda Širca and Minister of Education and Sport Igor Lukšič attended the opening of the festival and its first screenings.

45th MARIBOR THEATRE FESTIVAL

Albert Kos Photo STA



THE MARIBOR THEATRE FESTIVAL (Borštnikovo srečanje), named after one of the founders of Slovenian theatre, the actor Ignacij Borštnik (1858 – 1919), is the main annual Slovenian theatre festival, and since its beginning it has been hosted and

organised by the Slovenian National Theatre of Maribor. This year's festival, the 45th in succession, while keeping to the unchanged festival format, has brought in a number of interesting new features, especially thanks to the stage writer and theatre journalist Alja Predan,

who took over its leadership as art director a year ago.

The most notable feature of this year's festival, which involved 70 different events running from 15 to 24 October, was that it was spread more around the city, at several venues and other locations, so its

pulse and dimensions could be enjoyed by as many people as possible. In terms of substance, the festival director sought to emphasise the scope for the international positioning of Slovenian theatre in Europe and around the world, and linked to this was the makeover experienced by the festival as an international promoter of Slovenian theatrical creativity. In addition to performances in the official festival competition programme, which was formulated through the choices of this year's festival selector Gregor Butala, the invited foreign experts in particular were the target audience for what was called a 'showcase' presentation of Slovenian productions, which were additionally selected by Ms. Predan, so to a large extent this 'showcase' overlapped with the performance programme from the official festival competition, but differed from it by including some of the most innovative and provocative stage productions, which were not part of the festival programme, but were likely to have been especially interesting for the foreign guests.

The ensuing set of performances, named *Bridges*, comprised guest performances by theatres from Budapest,

Belgrade, Zagreb, Wrocław and Rijeka, while the accompanying events consisted of an international conference on the topic of interculturalism and a symposium on stage adaptation between reality and vision.

Here the Maribor Theatre Festival has placed greater emphasis this year on the now traditional collaboration with the Ljubljana Academy of Theatre, Radio, Film and Television, which for the duration of the festival pretty much 'moved house' to Maribor, students, professors and all, providing a presentation of student productions and performances from all four undergraduate years in the theatre performance and directing departments. At the same time, this year the artistic director made a special effort to involve as closely and actively as possible in the festival students from Maribor's Faculty of Arts.

Yet with all these new features, the Maribor Theatre Festival remains true to its tradition, a critical overview of the best creative achievements in Slovenian theatre of the past season and awards for them, be it awards for specific productions as a whole or for individual actors appearing in them, plus awards

for the directors, set designers, costume designers and others involved creatively in staging the production. The end of the festival was again marked this year by the presentation of Borštnik Prizes, the highest award for theatre creativity in Slovenia, as well as the Borštnik Ring, which is presented each year to an actor as a lifetime achievement award for work in the theatre and excellence in stagecraft.

Another important element this year before the festival opened was the final resolving of its status, and alongside the drama, opera and ballet companies it has become one of the independent units of the Slovenian National Theatre of Maribor, thereby preserving its autonomy, while at the same time it will be ensured all future logistical support from the parent theatre. Interest in the continued existence and development of the festival has been shown by the Slovenian Ministry of Culture and the City of Maribor in the form of increased subsidies, which will at least partly compensate for the decline in sponsorship, a part of which has dried up owing to the economic crisis.

SOUTH/SOUTHEAST: Fashion Design in Southeast Europe

Andrej Savelli Photo Archive

THE SOTO SOCIETY (Contemporary Slovene Textile and Clothing Design), with the collaboration of the Museum of Architecture and Design/BIO Secretariat, prepared the sale exhibition *South/Southeast: Fashion Design in Southeast Europe*. The exhibition is part of the 22nd Biennial of Industrial Design Accompanying Programme and will be held at the Temporary Showroom, Vošnjakova 4, Ljubljana, until October 31.

The sale exhibition presents established, contemporary, conceptual

fashion designers and design students from Slovenia, Croatia, Poland, Latvia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Serbia, the Czech Republic, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Romania and Ukraine. The mission of the project »South/Southeast« is to discover the identity behind fashion design and the designers that have built their identity in Southeastern Europe and to deliver it to the Slovenian and global audience, so it will introduce 50 of the top fashion brands in Southeast Europe at the first joint showroom.

More information about the project at:
www.soto.si
<http://www.facebook.com/pages/SOTO/118941761489381>





ELITE EMIGRANTS

For a Slovenian, Slovenia is home. But what if that is not enough?

Sanja Prelević Photo Personal Archive, Shutterstock

SLOVENIAN SCIENTISTS, UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS AND ACADEMICS WORKING BEYOND THE BORDERS OF SLOVENIA AND OVERSEAS REPRESENT AN EXTRAORDINARY INTELLECTUAL POTENTIAL.

SCIENTISTS FROM THE JOŽEF STEFAN INSTITUTE (IJS) in Ljubljana have recently celebrated a remarkable achievement. By implementing a dynamic phase transition which simulates the Big Bang in a chronological progression similar to that which occurred at the formation of the universe, they became the first scientists in the world to observe Higgs waves, which are the equivalent of the Higgs boson, dubbed the 'God particle'. This is the same 'God particle' for which the Large Hadron Collider at the European Centre for Nuclear Research (CERN) was built. This outstanding achievement also represents an advance in the speed of operation of memory components in mobile technology.

This extraordinary scientific experiment carried out by Slovenian scientists working in Ljubljana in collaboration with foreign experts was reported in the international scientific journal Nature Physics. Names of Slovenian origin are by no means rare in this and other similar journals dedicated to top-flight scientific achievements.

Slovenian scientists, university professors and academics working beyond the borders of Slovenia and overseas represent an extraordinary intellectual potential. It is estimated that at least 10% of all Slovenian researchers work abroad – assuming that there are 12,000 researchers in the Republic of Slovenia. A large number of scientists and top experts are the descendants – of the second or third generation – of Slovenian emigrants to countries such as the USA and Argentina.

In recent times we have seen ambitious young scientists, mainly from the natural sciences and technical fields, leaving the country to continue their careers abroad, mainly in the USA and Canada. The USA already has the Washington-based Slovenian-American Science and Technology Association (SASTA) and the

Cleveland Slovenian Business and Professional Association (CSBPA). There are currently around 200 young experts working abroad who have left Slovenia in recent years.

We asked Dr Diego Klabjan, an associate professor in the Industrial Engineering and Management Sciences Department at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, why so many prominent Slovenian experts are leaving the country.

'Other countries, in my case the USA, are considerably more competitive than Slovenia and therefore encourage more innovation and offer greater challenges. Slovenia offers much less competition and therefore, potentially, stagnation. As a much bigger country, the USA is more dynamic and offers an extraordinarily varied life full of challenges. Working with companies like Google, IBM, FedEx is something that you really have to go abroad to do.' This is how Dr Klabjan explains the reasons for his own departure from Slovenia 16 years ago.

“PROBABLY THE EASIEST THING TO DO IS TO SIT IN SLOVENIA AND WHINE ABOUT HOW THE BRAINS ARE DRAINING. I THINK THAT IT WOULD BE BETTER TO FOCUS ON THE GOOD SIDE OF THIS PHENOMENON AND TRY AS A NATION TO TAKE THE BEST ADVANTAGE OF IT THAT WE CAN.”

The 'brain drain' is not a problem – the problem is getting them to come back to Slovenia

Experts working in other countries do not all share the same opinion over whether a 'brain drain' is taking place in Slovenia. Dr Klabjan, for example, thinks that this concept is entirely appropriate and that we should not try and console ourselves for the departure of an expert by referring to globalisation and modern trends.

Another noted expert from Slovenia, Dr Jure Leskovec, a professor at Stanford University at the tender age of 29, recently told Sinfo that this is a more or less empty construct. 'Probably the easiest thing to do is to sit in Slovenia and whine about how the brains are draining. I think that it would be better to focus on the good side of this phenomenon and try as a nation to take the best advantage of it that we can'.

In the opinion of Dr Aljaž Ule, assistant professor at the Faculty of Economics and Econometrics at the University of Amsterdam and the Faculty of Mathematics, Science and Information Technology at the University of Primorska, 'brain drain' is an unfortunate term, since – he says – it gives the impression that there is something wrong with smart people leaving the country.

'There is nothing wrong with this. I would go further: it is excellent for Slovenia, since this is the best way for Slovenians to learn about the latest advances in science and technology at good universities and institutes and companies around the world and to gain experience and knowledge which is lacking in Slovenia. The problem, in his opinion, is more to do with 'brain return'.

'I believe that Slovenia should encourage people to go

abroad but also try and ensure that as much as possible of the knowledge obtained in this way is exploited in Slovenia,' says Dr Ule, adding: 'Current approaches to this are often unsuccessful. The Bank of Slovenia uses the threat of fines to force its foreign scholarship holders to return. Getting experienced Slovenians to return to Slovenia or at least collaborate with Slovenia is something that needs to be motivated, not compelled.'

'Cooperation between Slovenia and Slovenian scientists in the USA would improve significantly if a social agreement between the USA and Slovenia were reached,' muses Dr Jernej

Barbič, a tenure-track assistant professor of computer science at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, USA. 'There are many Slovenian scientists in the USA who do not collaborate with Slovenia because if they were to return to Slovenia they would forfeit their US pension despite the fact that they have constantly paid compulsory pension contributions in the USA. Dilemmas like this could be resolved by a social agreement

with the USA like that already signed by all the old members of the EU and, of the new members, Poland and the Czech Republic. If such an agreement were adopted, this would be a positive signal to Slovenian scientists and other intellectuals abroad that the Republic of Slovenia is taking pains to ensure that after their eventual return to Slovenia they will have proper status and good conditions in which to work and create.'

Dr Ule is one of the few world-renowned Slovenian experts who has returned to Slovenia – in his case because of his work at the University of Primorska. He spends around three months a year in his home country. We asked him what needs to be done to ensure that Slovenian scientists and other top experts currently working abroad accept the challenge of working (at least partly) in Slovenia:

'The country must commit itself to ensuring that these people transfer at least part of the knowledge they have acquired abroad to their home country. The country should ask these Slovenians under what conditions they would wish to collaborate, at least on a part-time basis, with institutions in Slovenia, or even return to Slovenia for a longer period. We would then soon see where the obstacles are. I imagine that the problem lies in funding, in an academic environment which in Slovenia is not so oriented towards stimulus and creativity as it is abroad, with too little emphasis on research (and too much on teaching) and too little turnover of human resources (including people from abroad). But if we want to get people who are sufficiently successful abroad to already have opportunities there (and these are the people we need to get, not just those who have been unsuccessful abroad), then we need to offer competitive salaries, working conditions, >>>



Dr Breda Mulec, secretary in the office of the Minister for Slovenians Abroad



Dr Aljaž Ule, assistant professor at the Faculty of Economics and Econometrics at the University of Amsterdam and the Faculty of Mathematics, Science and Information Technology at the University of Primorska



freedom, etc. – and for the time being we are unable to offer a competitive academic research environment. Almost everyone I know who has returned to Slovenia from abroad has done so for personal reasons. For a Slovenian, Slovenia is home. From most other points of view, however, the West is at least as interesting. Naturally I often think about going back, but at the moment working conditions at academic research institutions in Slovenia are still too poor. I am hoping that the new higher education act will change things.'

Web directory of Slovenian scientists online from September

In order that these and other opinions of Slovenian experts living and working abroad can be heard in Slovenia, and above all in order to take advantage of their knowledge and experience in the home country, the Government Office for Slovenians Abroad has this year begun implementing ambitious plans. Their aim is to connect Slovenians abroad, not only via culture but also via science.

Last month www.slovinci.si, the web portal for Slovenians abroad published a web directory – a list of prominent Slovenian scientists, above all university professors – in an effort to encourage closer cooperation with Slovenian scientists.

“GETTING EXPERIENCED SLOVENIANS TO RETURN TO SLOVENIA OR AT LEAST COLLABORATE WITH SLOVENIA IS SOMETHING THAT NEEDS TO BE MOTIVATED, NOT COMPELLED.”

'The list, to which new names of scientists and other experts of Slovenian origin are being added on a daily basis, is a publicly accessible directory of scientists with an indication of the expert fields in which they work. The list is of course published with the consent of the people involved,' explains Dr Breda Mulec, secretary in the office of the Minister for Slovenians Abroad.

'By the end of the year,' says Dr Mulec, 'a Science Committee will be founded at the Government Council for Slovenians Abroad. This committee will consist of top experts and scientists working abroad. In the next phase we want to invite them to collaborate on the preparation of strategic (government) development documents. Greater cooperation with universities, public institutions and research institutes can be achieved by promoting contacts, networking, etc. A large number of scientists have, for example, shown interest in taking part in the reform of higher education.'

Dr Mulec warns that closer cooperation with Slovenian experts from abroad is not a project the results of which will be visible overnight, and points out that the Office is aware that in order for major changes to take place in this field, the cooperation of several state institutions at different levels is needed. A positive response from Slovenia's universities could also significantly affect the success of the project. After all, we have to start somewhere. ●

JOŽEF STEFAN INSTITUTE

The Jožef Stefan Institute in Ljubljana is Slovenia's leading research institution in the fields of science and technology.

Albert Kos Photo STA

FOUNDED IN 1949 AS THE PHYSICS INSTITUTE, IT SOON adopted the name of the eminent physicist Jožef Stefan, who was of Slovenian origin, and became the Jožef Stefan Physics Institute. Initially its scientific and research activity was mainly oriented towards research in the field of nuclear physics and the use of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, so for a decade it was known as the Jožef Stefan Nuclear Institute. It was also during this period that the Reactor Centre was built in Podgorica near Ljubljana. The Reactor Centre still operates today as part of the Jožef Stefan Institute. After 1969 the Jožef Stefan Institute reoriented the bulk of its activity towards non-nuclear activities and dropped the word 'Nuclear' from its name. The status of official founder passed from the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, the original founder, to the University of Ljubljana. Since 1992 the Jožef Stefan Institute has been an independent public research institution and its founder is thus formally the Republic of Slovenia.

A broad spectrum of scientific research and a ramified network of international cooperation

Last year the Jožef Stefan Institute began its seventh decade of activity. Under its aegis, its researchers today work in a great number of scientific fields divided into four broad research categories – electronics and information technology, physics, chemistry and biochemistry, and nuclear technology and energy. In each of these areas there are several research departments, making a total of 27. Each department has its



In the second half of the 19th century, world-renowned Slovenian physicist Jožef Stefan (1835–1893) was professor of mathematics and physics at the University of Vienna and the director of the Physics Institute. He is chiefly famous as the co-author of a law on black-body radiation which was later theoretically explained by Ludwig Boltzmann. (The Stefan-Boltzmann law)

own researchers, though of course the departments vary in size. The Institute currently employs 654 researchers and has a total staff, including technical and administrative workers, of 882. The majority of the Institute's researchers hold PhDs. Many of them are also professors and lecturers at the universities of Ljubljana, Maribor and Nova Gorica, while at the same time many professors from these three universities are involved in research work at the Institute.

The Institute is also an important factor in the higher education process, with over 550 researchers having completed their master's and doctoral theses at the Institute in the last decade. The Institute is also a co-founder of the University of Nova Gorica (1995) and the Jožef Stefan International Postgraduate School (2003). In the international field the Jožef Stefan Institute has ties with some of the most prestigious scientific institutions in the world and with numerous eminent scientists in other countries. At the same time it ensures a continuous international exchange of experts. Its specialist and academic credentials are also demonstrated by its international advisory board. The forms of international cooperation in which the Institute is involved are



View of the exterior of the Jožef Stefan Institute

very varied, ranging from multilateral research projects in which it actively participates to numerous bilateral projects carried out in conjunction with similar institutions in other countries.

Orientation of research towards new technological solutions in the fields of environmental protection, medicine and production processes in the business enterprise sector

The Institute devotes itself particularly actively to research that contributes to the protection of the environment and the development of new technologies in this field. Another extremely important orientation of the Institute is collaboration with medical institutions on the development of medical equipment, the provision of isotopes for clinical research and the treatment of patients, and the introduction of new research methods into clinical medicine in general. It is particularly committed to the promotion of technological and economic development, above all through training of the personnel responsible for developmental research in companies. Generally speaking, the Institute's researchers are constantly endeavouring to transfer their knowledge and the results of their research to industry

“ WE SLOVENIANS CAN BE PROUD OF HAVING SUCH A PRESTIGIOUS INSTITUTE WHICH OVER THE COURSE OF ITS 60-YEAR HISTORY HAS BECOME A TRADEMARK OF SLOVENIA (PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC DANILO TÜRK AT THE GALA EVENT MARKING THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE JOŽEF STEFAN INSTITUTE). ”

and therefore the Institute has always worked closely with the business enterprise sector. This is of key importance in overcoming Slovenia's technological deficit in comparison to the more developed countries of Europe. This was the reason behind the founding, in 1992, of the Jožef Stefan Institute Technology Park, renamed the Ljubljana Technology Park when other founding partners joined the project. The Technology Park brings together companies that are interested in a close connection with the research environment. This is also one of the ways in which the Institute is attempting to encourage the transfer of knowledge and modern technology to the business enterprise sector.



Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology Gregor Golobič (second from the right) visiting one of the laboratories of the Jožef Stefan Institute

Detection of Higgs waves – a recent achievement of international importance of the Jožef Stefan Institute

There is no room here to list and illustrate all the Institute's achievements to date, both old and new, but we must certainly mention the latest and most remarkable of these achievements, published in August this year. The researchers in the Department of Complex Matter, headed by Professor Dragan Mihailović, successfully triggered symmetry breaking on a timescale of 10⁻¹⁴–10⁻¹³ seconds, simulating the Big Bang in a chronological progression, rather as is believed to have happened at the formation of the universe. In doing so, they became the first to observe Higgs waves, which are the equivalent of the Higgs boson, dubbed 'the God particle' by the media, the discovery of which would represent a victory for modern theoretical physics. This extraordinary achievement of researchers at the Jožef Stefan Institute, in collaboration with scientists from Stanford University and the CNRS laboratory in Orsay, Paris, was recently published in the prestigious international scientific journal Nature Physics. The above experiment is not only of extraordinary theoretical importance, it also has significant applicable value because the matter identified is very similar to that which the most up-to-date technology is building into the latest generation of memory chips.

In practice, this discovery points to the possibility of a major advance in the speed of operation of memory elements, which we may shortly expect to see in our mobile phones.

This supreme research achievement, the latest in a long series, once again confirms and consolidates the position of the Jožef Stefan Institute in elite international scientific circles, while among the Slovenian public it promotes the importance of investment in scientific and technical research



“ THE JOŽEF STEFAN INSTITUTE IS PART OF SLOVENIAN CULTURAL IDENTITY AND TODAY ITS NAME CAN BE HEARD THROUGHOUT THE WORLD' (DIRECTOR OF THE JOŽEF STEFAN INSTITUTE DR JADRAN LENARČIČ IN HIS FOREWORD TO THE REPORT ON THE INSTITUTE'S WORK IN 2009). ”

which may seem far removed from everyday life and, for most people, difficult to understand, but which is of key importance for the further development of society and its prosperity and well-being. For this reason, the Jožef Stefan Institute also remains open to the general public, in particular to young people, since it wishes to encourage their interest in science and technology and draw those who have a particular feeling for these disciplines into the sphere of its activities on a longer-term basis.



'RÔTISSEURS' IN SLOVENIA

Portorož hosts the first International Grand Chapitre

Janez Bogataj Photo Tomaž Dular

THE CHAÎNE DES RÔTISSEURS, an international gastronomic society, has its roots in the medieval French guild of goose roasters founded in the 13th century. Today the Chaîne is a modern international organisation with members in over 70 countries. Slovenia is also part of the Chaîne, with its own national chapter or Bailliage founded in Ljubljana in 2005. The Chaîne des Rôtisseurs is dedicated to the preservation and development of the culinary arts and gastronomy, fine dining and wine culture, and cultivates hospitality and good fellowship in many forms. The Chaîne brings together

non-professional members with an interest in cuisine and professional members such as chefs and hotel and restaurant owners. The Chaîne logo displayed outside a restaurant is of course a guarantee of quality. There are already 13 such restaurants in Slovenia. Members of the Chaîne meet once a month at special dinners held in Chaîne establishments. In addition, all national Bailliaiges can host a major international event known as a Grand Chapitre once a year (or in some cases every few years). These events can have a great importance for the promotion of individual cities and countries in terms of gastronomy,



cuisine, tourism and so on. The Slovenian chapter of the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs successfully held its first international event of this kind in Portorož from 23 to 26 September 2010. Participants from Slovenia were joined at the event by distinguished Chaîne members from 10 European countries.

To coincide with the four-day event, the Slovenian members of the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs published an informative brochure announcing the individual elements of the programmes. On the first day the participants gathered at the Santomas winery in the village of Šmarje near Koper, where there was a dinner and



Tomaž Ravnikar, Bailli Délégué de Slovénie, Membre du Conseil Magistral

a tasting of wines from the Santomas cellar. The dinner was prepared by Robert Gregorčič of the Otočec Hotels group and Anita and Miha Potočnik of Gostilna Čubr in Križ near Komenda. Even this first menu was clearly oriented towards contemporary interpretations of Slovenian dishes – a characteristic of all the menus throughout the event. Guests were treated to fresh chanterelle mushrooms with potato, smoked trout with fennel foam, ričet (a kind of barley porridge containing beans and smoked pork) and an outstanding Krško Polje roast suckling pig seasoned with savory and served with puréed potatoes and beans with cracklings. A sorbet of beetroot and raspberry then served as a palate cleanser before the main course, which consisted of fillet of young Kočevje venison in a juniper berry sauce served with a kohlrabi soufflé and asparagus. The pudding was an outstanding strawberry ice cream served with dried meringues and zabaione alla Malvasia. The next day began with a visit to Ljubljana for the foreign participants. Ljubljana was a great discovery for all of them, and their praise for the city's orderliness and cleanliness had hardly abated before it was time to ride the funicular up to the Castle for a typical Ljubljana lunch in the castle restaurant: beef broth with

liver dumplings, fried frogs' legs and sautéed potatoes, and Ljubljana curd cheese pancakes with tarragon. A perfect experience of Slovenia's capital city. After lunch the visitors set off to Postojna Cave. Following an exhaustive visit to the cave, the guests were greeted by representatives of the Postojna Cave management and treated to exquisitely prepared dishes characteristic of the Notranjska-Karst region and a presentation of the original wines of the Primorska wine region in the Jamski Dvorec mansion. The guests were particularly enthusiastic about the delicious traditional dishes prepared in a contemporary manner and the explanations offered by the head chef. The second day ended with dinner at the Gostilna Apolonia in Šmarje pri Sežani, another Chaîne establishment. Dinner was a lesson in supreme gastronomy, featuring the entire palette of flavours of the Karst region, complemented by local wines. The menu began with Karst-style steak with horseradish and herbs, scallops in a crust of sweet local bacon served with a foam of fresh porcini mushrooms, and bleki (pasta squares) with a hare sauce perfectly set off by oregano and mature sheep's cheese from the Karst. The main course was fish: an excellent Piran sea bass from



the Fonda fish farm served with a cream of young peas. The pudding was figs in a Teran reduction. The morning of the third day had an educational and social character, with participants taking a boat trip off the Slovenian coast aboard the Burja. An outstanding hot and cold seafood buffet was provided on board by the chef from Rožmarin in Maribor. The experience was made even more interesting by a visit to the fish farm where the Fonda family farm Piran sea bass. Dr Irena Fonda came aboard the Burja to offer a detailed explanation of all the characteristics of this remarkable fresh fish, which is also known outside the borders of Slovenia. Her explanation ended with a marvellous sea bass carpaccio that was sliced in front of the guests and seasoned with fleur de sel from the Sečovlje saltworks and extra virgin olive oil from Slovenian Istria. Back on dry land, there was a break before the main evening event and the gala dinner at the Kempinski Palace Hotel in Portorož. New members from Slovenia and Italy were inducted into the Chaîne according to the established protocol, which includes an oath and a tap on the shoulder with a sword. The ceremony was conducted by Chaîne des



Gala dinner



Rôtisseurs vice-president Günter Albert, from Monaco. The formal reception, at which all the new members received their distinctive membership chains and ribbons, diplomas and membership badges, was followed by a gala dinner in the Crystal Hall of the Kempinski Palace Hotel. The dinner was prepared by Slovenian Chaîne members Janez Bratovž, Maruška Gašparin, Tomaž Kavčič, Matevž Kmet, Tanja Pintarič and Ana Roš with Daniel Scheffler, the chef of the Kempinski Palace Hotel. The dinner, in this remarkable historical setting, was without question a fine dining experience featuring first-class cuisine. On the terrace outside the Crystal Hall, the guests first sampled a variety of imaginatively served hors d'oeuvres accompanied by Medot Brut champagne. Once seated, they were served with goose liver prepared in four different ways, followed by a unique soup or hotpot of wild beans with shellfish. The raviolo with curd cheese, pistachio and twin sauces was masterful, and the millet bread in bujta repa

(pickled turnip stew) was astonishing. The main course consisted of loin of venison in a bitter chocolate and sage sauce, accompanied by a white bread and porcini soufflé and flame-cooked blueberries. There were two puddings but the sweet culmination of the evening was an unforgettable confection of milk chocolate with raspberries, sablé-sablé, mousse, jelly and ganache. The various courses were accompanied by the finest Slovenian wines, making the dinner truly exceptional. Without exaggeration, I can say that this dinner represented one of the highest points of Slovenian gastronomy since the end of the Second World War. Spiritual food was contributed by the pianist Bojan Gorišek. After dinner, the guests

gathered on the terrace of the hotel to enjoy a selection of cheeses from the Pustotnik Farm and a Grande Cuvée from the Santomas winery. Late into the night and on into the morning, they could not speak highly enough of their experience of Slovenia, its natural beauties, its extraordinary regional gastronomic diversity, its excellent wines, and so on. The foreign visitors were unanimous in insisting that they will be coming to Slovenia on holiday next year. Thanks to the efforts and understanding of the Government Communication Office, an exhibition entitled 'The Slovenian Gastronomic Year', featuring Janez Pukšič's photographs of contemporary interpretations of traditional Slovenian dishes by chef Janez Bratovž, was installed in the lobby of the Kempinski Palace. In the future this exhibition will visit several cities around Europe and, like the 1st International Grand Chapitre de Slovénie of the Chaîne des Rôtisseurs, make an important contribution to shaping Slovenia's gastronomic identity and recognisability in the outside world. ●

EXCITING WINTER ON THE CARDS, WITH PLENTY OF OUTSTANDING SPORT

Andrej Stare Photo STA

THE WINTER SEASON OF SPORTS ON SNOW AND ICE IS beckoning. Each year we keep a close watch on how the top Slovenian winter sports people are getting ready, quietly hoping for an even better season than last year's, with plenty of wins and crystal globes at the end of the season. This winter season will be something special. After an Olympic year that brought us some major success, including three Olympic medals, 2011 will be a year of world championships.

World Championships 2011

- 14 January La Molina (Spain) - Snowboarding
- 8 February Garmisch - Partenkirchen (Germany) - Alpine skiing
- 23 February Oslo/Holmenkollen (Norway) - Nordic skiing
- 1 March Khanty Mansiysk (Russia) - Biathlon
- 29 April Bratislava (Slovakia) - Ice hockey

The heroes of last winter season were Tina Maze (Alpine skiing) with her haul of two silver medals from the Olympic Games in Vancouver (Whistler), cross-country skier Petra Majdič with her Olympic bronze at Vancouver and her sprint win in the World Cup (second place overall) and Robert Kranjec, who secured an overall win in the Ski Flying World Cup.

This time they are all a year older, a year more experienced and once again they are ready to sacrifice everything – time, energy, emotions and even health – for results.

Ski jumping

This year's World Championship will be at the refurbished jumps in Holmenkollen, where to date Slovenia has enjoyed some major success. Robert Kranjec is once again in fine form, and is determined to secure one of the top spots. Can he follow in the footsteps of Franci Petek (1991) and Rok Benkovič (2005) and make it to the top of the world? In his team-mates Peter Prevc, Jernej Damjan and Mitja Mežnar he will have outstanding partners for top training, and perhaps even a surprise in the team event. Now something of a tradition, this season's ski jumping will end for the seventh time with finals in no less than three World Cup competitions at the Planica jump. This year Robert Kranjec will be defending his overall title in the Ski Flying World Cup. And this year, in addition to the finals at Planica, there will be ski flying competitions at the refurbished jumps at Harrachov (Czech Republic) and Vikersund (Norway), and there will also be the traditional February ski flights at Oberstdorf.



Tina Maze

World Cup competitions in Slovenia 2010 - 2011:

- Pokljuka - Biathlon (full programme) 14 - 19 December 2010
- Maribor/Pohorje - Women's Alpine Skiing (slalom, giant slalom) 15 - 16 January 2011
- Kranjska Gora - Men's Alpine Skiing (slalom, giant slalom) 5 - 6 March 2011
- Planica - Ski Jumping/Flying, 17 - 20 March 2011

Alpine skiing

This year once again the eyes of Slovenia will be on Tina Maze, who was magnificent last year in the speed disciplines and giant slalom, also breaking through to the top echelon in the slalom. This year she has a great opportunity to earn perhaps even an overall victory in the World Cup, something no Slovenian skier, male or female, has yet achieved. After last year's 4th place, the optimism in the Maze camp is justified. Tina Maze has prepared well for a tough season, which will kick off on 22 October at the Sölden glacier, in the southern hemisphere, and she is again in top form. Meanwhile, her younger team-mates Maruša Ferk, Ilka Štuhec and Vanja Brodnik will try as hard as they can to keep up with Slovenia's best woman skier.

Among the men, Slovenia's strongest weapon will again be the skiers, led by Andrej Jerman and Andrej Šporn, and Rok Perko, Aleš Gorza and Mitja Valenčič will be trying to match their results of last year.

Cross-country skiing

After some serious injuries at the Vancouver Olympics, our champion Petra Majdič is nevertheless resolved to continue her shining career. Her goal this year is clear, to win the overall ranking in the World Cup and to secure victory and another medal at the World Championship in Oslo (Petra won her first medal at the World Championships in 2007 in Sapporo). This time around Majdič is promising some major progress in terms of results in the freestyle event, in which last season she was gaining on the best Scandinavians and Russians and on the Pole Jusztyna Kowalczyk. Sadly this winter there will be no World Cup competitions on Rogla, so the caravan of competitors will get its first test from 20 to

21 November at Gällivare in northern Sweden. Alongside Majdič, a high ranking in the sprints beckons for Vesna Fabjan (last year she won her first victory in the World Cup) and Katja Višnar.

Biathlon

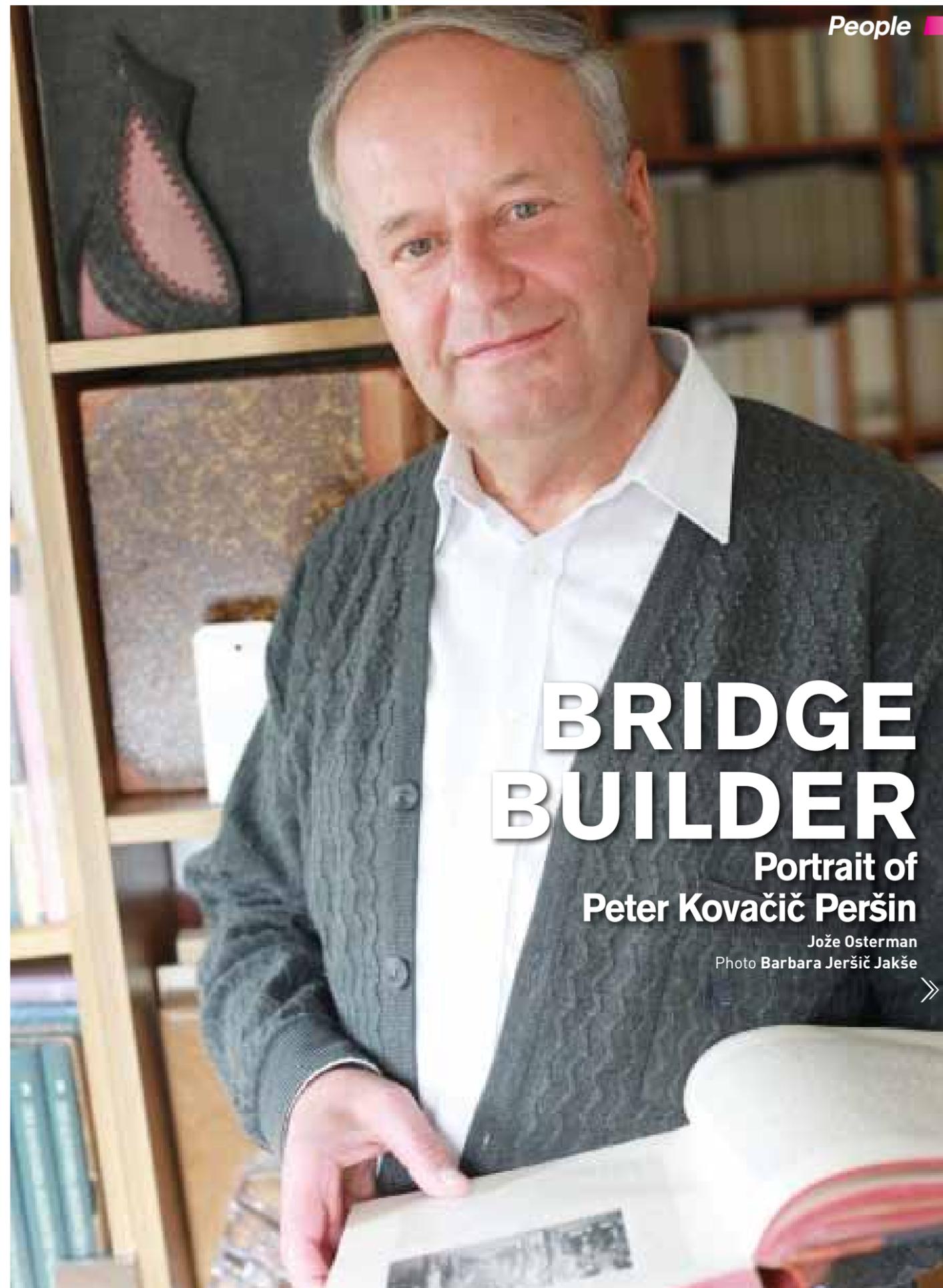
The biggest upheavals in biathlon circles took place after the last season ended. Croatian Jakov Fak, who holds an Olympic medal and has been training for several years now with the Slovenian team, wants to compete for Slovenia. But his transfer will probably amount to nothing, since despite Fak's determination to represent Slovenia, the Croatians are demanding no less than 100,000 euros in compensation from the Slovenian Federation. Without the permission of the Croatian Biathlon Federation, Fak cannot appear for Slovenia. Meanwhile, all of Slovenia's biathlon aspirations are focused on Khanty Mansiysk, the venue for the World Championship. This Russian city in the Urals is something special – it is linked to the outside world only by its airport. It has no roads going into it, neither does it have any railway links. The Slovenian squad no longer has Dijana Ravnikar, who has retired from competition. So Slovenia's First Lady will again be Teja Gregorin, who could win in any competition, and she looks set to expand her collection of top rankings quite considerably. As for the boys, the greatest chances for a top spot once again seem to lie with Janez Marič and Klemen Bauer.

Snowboarding

Slovenia's snowboarders are also impatient for the season to start. This year it will actually get going in the sports hall at Langraaf in the Netherlands. Rok Flander and Žan Košir in particular will be striving for top places in the parallel disciplines. The World Championship will be in the middle of January, making it the first of all the winter championships. And Spain will be hosting the best snowboarders for the first time at La Molina.

Ice hockey

Following its victory in the Group B (1st Division) competition in Ljubljana, Slovenia's ice hockey team has returned to the world elite. The World Championship will start on 29 April in Bratislava (Slovakia). Slovenia's opponents will be Slovakia, Russia and Germany. In its five appearances to date among the top hockey nations, Slovenia has never managed to stay in the elite division in the first round of the competition. They have been beaten out in play-offs three times by the Latvians and twice by the Austrians. This time the rejuvenated Slovenian team, which will be managed for the third year running by the American coach John Harrington, will give it everything right from the first game. Youngsters such as Jeglič, Tičar, Sabolič, Žiga Pance, Ropret, Urbas and Muršak will also be trying to win a seventh appearance among the world elite in 2012 in Finland and Sweden. In all probability there is no real chance of Slovenia's team featuring the best national ice hockey player, Anže Kopitar, or perhaps only in the event of his club the Los Angeles Kings not making it to the finals of the NHL league. If he gets a place in the first team, for the same reason there will be a big question mark over the appearance of Jan Muršak, who plays for the Detroit Red Wings. •



BRIDGE BUILDER

Portrait of
Peter Kovačič Peršin

Jože Osterman
Photo Barbara Jeršič Jakše





“Even if he had not won the Rožanc Prize, Kovačič merits some attention. His human experience represents a singular kind of summary of the social and.”

A LONGSIDE THE KRESNIK PRIZE awarded to the writer of the best novel and the Grum Prize received by the writer of the best dramatic work, the Rožanc Prize, given for the best essay, speaks of the rational use of the organised “prize” system intended for the best Slovenian literary writers. The essayist, dramatist, novel writer and journalist Marjan Rožanc, who died in 1990 and after whom the prize is named, was a man of great energy, by profession a sports manager, always treading the very edge of what was then in the socialist system “socially acceptable criticism”, meaning of course that he inexorably expanded the boundaries of artistic freedom. In this respect, the prize recipients have often been quite similar to him: the first recipient, Drago Jančar, is one of those rare names for whom one could say that in the former regime he was a true dissident, and to his name we could add writers such as Vinko Ošlak, Iztok Geister, Dušan Jovanović, Ifigenija Zagoričnik - Simonović and more, who did not exactly enjoy any compassion from the environment they worked in. This year’s recipient, Peter

Kovačič Peršin, undoubtedly falls into this context, too.

Even if he had not won the Rožanc Prize, Kovačič merits some attention. His human experience represents a singular kind of summary of the social and, even more, the intimately human development and changes that took place in Slovenia in the second half of the 20th century, and which we could call a search for the “active position of the Slovenian Christian” in the lay society as was formed after the second Vatican Council. This process started in Slovenia eight decades ago, and is embodied in Edvard Kocbek, one of the most outstanding figures of the 20th century. Kovačič was – as he proudly admits – one of his close friends, while at the same time being one of his students, who in the oppressive days of the 1970s undoubtedly provided great support for the isolated and disappointed Kocbek. The conviction that socialism, as well as any other social system, needed to be ennobled and enriched with the Christian values of love for others, and in this way protected from the manipulation that political interests inject into it in their

desire for power, was a fundamental principle for Kocbek, but one that he was unable to succeed in during his lifetime, for the pitfalls were too deep. It was only until several decades after Kocbek that some crossings were put in place over these pitfalls, and today great efforts will still be needed to develop them into solid roads of mutual tolerance and trust. In the process of opening up these roads, Kovačič is even today leaving a major mark.

Piecing the fragments together

What internal need drives a person to persevere in seeking something that he already suspects in advance might put him in trouble and even danger? Perhaps the memory of his father whom he never knew? Kovačič’s father, a member of the Home Guard whom the British returned to the Yugoslav Partisans directly after the Second World War, and who was executed without trial, lies in one of the many mass graves in Slovenia. Like many settlements close to the bigger cities, the village of Rakitna, up in the hills 20 km south of Ljubljana, was most precariously

exposed to the warring sides. “When a person is stuck between two sides in a war, on the one side the Partisans, on the other side the occupation forces and their local collaborators, he has no good options. While the village at first supported the Partisans, later on, owing to the liquidation of quite a number of landed farmers it turned its back on them, and tried to protect itself by setting up Village Guards. My father opposed the civil conflict and did not get involved in that voluntary formation. Following the Italian capitulation and German occupation, however, he was mobilised into the Home Guard forces, and although he would not bear arms, he was nevertheless liquidated after the war,” he says, quite calmly, and without any anger, recalling the hopeless situation where all sense of reason fails. “My mother was from a family that provided several Partisan fighters”, he adds, pointing to the compounded horror of divisions that might have destroyed the family internally, although the surviving members did not allow this to happen, despite the high toll in blood, with 10 dead on either side. A sense of conciliation was alive in the family throughout the war and after it. After his father’s death, providing for the family was taken on squarely by his mother. The children got an education and were socially successful.

By studying theology at the Theological Faculty in Ljubljana, Kovačič attempted to trace the active role of the Christian in modern Slovenian society, but the Church leadership dismissed him owing to his critical views of Slovenian Catholicism. A study of comparative literature and Slavonic studies then led him to a creative circle of young artists and writers. This was the period of the European student movement. In 1969 he and friends founded Društvo [Society] 2000, which published the first dissident samizdat publication in the then Yugoslavia, *Revija 2000*. After a four-year hiatus from 1973 to 1977, a powerful circle of Christian intellectuals gathered around the magazine and publishing house of the same name. After 1980 this was one of the

most active and influential centres of the civil society, and was actively involved in the processes of democratisation and Slovenian independence, including through the establishing of the Christian social movement and political party.

The magazine opened up a space for active dialogue between the Church and socialist society. It softened the hard ideological and political position of the then authorities on the one side, and the rigid clerical position of the Church leadership on the other side, and undoubtedly opened up Slovenian society to more tolerant and respectful relations. Ultimately a climate of mutual accommodation started to take hold. It is no coincidence that Slovenia blazed the trail of democratisation in Yugoslav society of that time. Yet the critical distance maintained by Kovačič and his circle towards both sides has been kept up unwaveringly to the present day, for which reason the precarious position of the magazine and group has in no way diminished.

What of the future?

Kovačič accepted his only ever operationally active role in politics in 2000, when he became head of the government commission for dealing with the issue of

‘What internal need drives a person to persevere in seeking something that he already suspects in advance might put him in trouble and even danger? Perhaps the memory of his father whom he never knew?’

hushed-up graves. This subject, which has also marked his life, still appears today to be the toughest nut to crack between the sides that clashed in the Second World War. Emotions, even those of extreme enmity, are still raw. After monumental efforts, the Kovačič commission arranged a memorial park to the victims of mass killings, it arranged the biggest graveyards and made a list of all graves. It also drafted legislation for their proper arrangement

and a compromise solution for gravestone inscriptions. The parliament did not actually support these proposals in their entirety, but it is increasingly clear that there are probably not going to be any more acceptable options. Peršin merits recognition for doing major, albeit unfinished, work.

The prize-winning essays in the collection *Vrnitev k Itaki* (Return to Ithaca), sub-headed *Slovenians in the processes of globalisation*, are in a way a synthesis of all of Kovačič’s experiences. He partly unveiled these experiences in his numerous philosophical compositions and essays published for the most part in *Revija 2000*, and partly in the books *Zaveza slovenstvu* (Covenant with the Slovenian Identity, 1993), *Metafizika besede* (Metaphysics of the Word, 2001), *Etos sodobnega bivanja* (Ethos of Modern Living, 2005) and *Kako biti* (How to Be, 2006). This book deals with the modern civilisational transformation of global society, in which the position of the nation is also changing.

In the introduction Kovačič writes: “In gaining national independence, we Slovenians have found ourselves in processes that are putting an end to nation states and most of what maintains their sovereignty: from an independent political life, military and economy to their own administrative organisation of the legal order and even education. The remaining things that maintain national identity are therefore the mother tongue and its culture, and the space of national settlement.” In the processes of globalisation, which include European integration, the Slovenian nation is experiencing a restructuring of its society and also a deep internal reorientation of its values. European integration is the result of globalisation of the world. It has been stimulated by the desire to ensure peace on our continent, to move beyond the politics of imperialist relations and to establish a new coexistence among nations based on cooperation and solidarity. These principles derive from a respect for the autonomy of European

nations as entities with their own cultural, linguistic and historical features. Respect for these differences is the only solid foundation for European association and life. Europe cannot follow a unification model, because in that way it would lose its cultural identity. Europe's cultural identity lies in its national, linguistic and cultural diversity, which sees culture in its original meaning as the spiritual activity of ennobling humanity, and rejects the levelling of culture into merely an object of market-oriented utility. Only a Europe anchored in its cultural tradition can hold out as a homeland of all its peoples. These are some of the main ideas in the book that lead the author to support a fundamental enhancement of national identity and a renewal of the national entity.

In the introduction Kovačič writes: "In gaining national independence, we Slovenians have found ourselves in processes that are putting an end to nation states and most of what maintains their sovereignty: from an independent political life, military and economy to their own administrative organisation of the legal order and even education."

This ties in somehow with the idea noted by Kocbek in the programme of the Liberation Front of the Slovenian Nation in 1941, where in one of the points he refers to the transformation of the Slovenian national character as a condition for national survival. Although he later also became a subject of criticism that therein lay the germ of totalitarianism, the fact is that less than 50 years later Slovenia became a nation with its own state. •



CONNECTING NATIONS AND CONSERVING MEMORIES

Hana Souček Morača Photo Aleš Šprah, Alenka Rebec, Municipality of Maribor, Municipality of Celje, Municipality of Piran



Puch Bridge in Ptuj

HUMAN BEINGS HAVE BEEN building bridges for millennia, but a bridge is much more than just an architectural structure that serves to reach a given point along a route. The power of the bridge as something that connects nations is reflected in exemplary fashion in the recent opening of the new bridge over the river Sotla that will link Rogatec on the Slovenian side with Hum na Sutli on the Croatian side. This solemn event was marked by speeches by Slovenian President Danilo Türk and his Croatian counterpart Ivo Josipović. The Slovenian President described the event as deeply symbolic, since it represents the conclusion of a phase in which the two countries have had to open a number of bridges which had not previously existed. Gornja Radgona is another town that can boast a bridge of friendship, this time connecting Slovenia and Austria.

This bridge is important not only in the economic sense but also symbolically, since it indicates the geographical, sociological and linguistic connections of two towns. This point was emphasised by the Slovenian transport minister Patrick Vlačič at the opening of the bridge over the Mura at Gornja Radgona in July 2010, when along with Kristina Edlinger-Ploder of the Styrian provincial government he officially declared the rebuilt bridge open. The bridge had been in service for 40 years but since no major repairs had been carried out in this time the two countries decided in 2009 to undertake joint repairs costing almost 1.4 million euros.

City of bridges

Three new bridges have been built in Slovenia's capital city during the mayoralty of Zoran Janković, a fact which

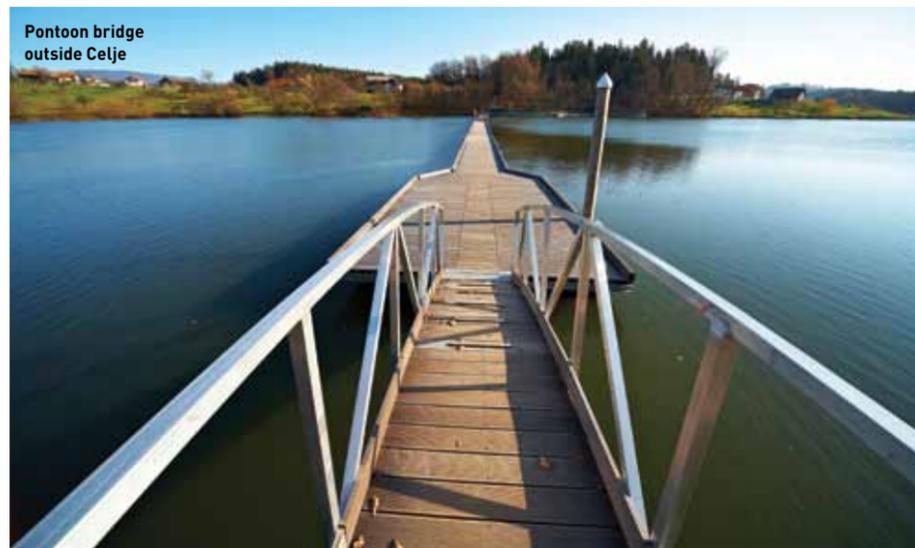
further confirms Ljubljana's reputation as a city of bridges. Not far from the Triple Bridge, between the porticoes of Plečnik's market, on the site chosen by the architect Jože Plečnik almost 100 years ago for a bridge linking the market and the Petkovšek Embankment, stands the Butchers' Bridge, construction of which began in November 2009 and which was opened in July 2010. The bridge is adorned by sculptures, a statue of Prometheus on the Petkovšek Embankment and miniatures on the bridge parapet that hint at the goings-on in the market stalls beyond. The sculptor Jakov Brdar was invited to collaborate by the bridge architects. His bronzes have become a constituent element of the bridge. A growing number of padlocks bearing love messages or the names of individuals have begun appearing on the steel cables of the bridge. This is a ritual

that is repeated on bridges around the world and which originates in a novel by the Italian writer Federico Moccia, who came up with the legend that if two lovers attach a padlock to the third lamp on the Ponte Milvio, the oldest bridge in Rome, and throw the key into the river, their love will live forever.

Another crossing over the Ljubljanica, near the building known as the Red House on the Poljane Embankment, began to be built in 2009. The construction of this footbridge, which links the Poljane side to the Petkovšek Embankment by the old Rog bicycle factory was completed in August 2010. The new Grain Bridge takes its name from the nearby square today known as Ambrož Square but from 1876 to 1898 called the Grain Square, because it was used as a grain market. The Grain Bridge thus conserves the memory of the days when grain was traded not far from the site of the bridge.

The 38-metre-long footbridge over the Gruber Canal at Špica, designed for pedestrians and cyclists, represents the start of the comprehensive urban renewal of the Špica area. It was opened in May 2009 and connects the city with its green suburbs and the Botanical Garden. The bridge is conceived as an ultralight structure without heavy, solid abutments and with merely a minimal foundation resting on piles. A spokesperson for the City of Ljubljana explained that the simple structure is designed as a space frame forming a double arch with an open triangular cross section, adding that the regeneration of the Špica area is planned to continue. The left bank of the river (the city side) will be laid out as a park with a landing stage, while on the right bank there will be a small square by the bridge with trees and benches.

A similar renovation awaits the Mortuary Bridge over the Gruber Canal by the Oncology Institute, which has been closed to traffic for some years. This cast-iron bridge originally stood on the site of today's Cobblers' Bridge before being moved to its present location by the architect Jože Plečnik. The idea of Ljubljana's deputy mayor Janez Koželj is to restore the structure, reassemble it and, in as early as 2011, erect it in a new



Pontoon bridge outside Celje



The Studenci Footbridge

location near the mouth of the Gradaščica stream, where, under its original name of the Hradecky Bridge, it will connect the Trnovo and Prule districts. The new bridge will be intended for pedestrians and cyclists. The new Mortuary Bridge will be open to all types of traffic and will have a design reminiscent of the arch of the existing bridge, with architectural elements added by Plečnik.

And elsewhere...

The positive practice of building bridges has also continued in other parts of Slovenia. The City of Maribor recently invested in the construction of the Studenci Footbridge, completed in 2008. Designed for pedestrians and cyclists, this bridge is situated in the embrace of the river Drava and the charming Lent district, the oldest part of the city,

between the Old Bridge and the Koroška Bridge. Two years ago, at Footbridge 2008, the third international expert conference on footbridges, held in Porto, Portugal, the Studenci Bridge took first prize in its category, winning the Footbridge Award and beating competition from Australia, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic.

In 2007 the town of Ptuj, the oldest documented town in Slovenia, also took on a new appearance with the opening of the Puch Bridge, the second road bridge over the Drava, built 50 years after the first. The bridge is named after the inventor Johann Puch (known in Slovenia as Janez Puh) and is part of the new road connection between Hajdina and Ptuj. The bridge is a 430-metre-long cable-stayed bridge over the man-made reservoir on the Drava. At the point at which the bridge crosses it, the reservoir



Footbridge in Ljubljana

The positive practice of building bridges has also continued in other parts of Slovenia.

is almost 300 metres wide and five metres deep. At the time it was designed, there were only a few bridges of this type in Europe, while a few more have been built in Japan. The bridge is also unique in its structural and design characteristics.

In September 2010 a new bridge in Sečovelje was officially opened with a symbolic cutting of the ribbon, following renovation of the original bridge and regulation of the immediate surrounding area by the municipality of Piran. The bridge, which has long connected the banks of the river Dnica, provides local inhabitants with access to the only shop in Sečovelje and to the airport. In the future it will also provide access to the planned golf course. In the municipality of Koper, in conjunction with the municipalities of Izola and Piran, the Ministry of Transport and partners from Croatia concluded the two-year 'Parenzana – Path of Health and Friendship' project. In 2008 a 12-metre bridge was built along the old Parenzana railway line, representing a continuation of the existing route running from the Slovenian-Italian border and a

constituent element of the over 500-metre section running through Škofije. An interesting connection suitable for cycling and recreation is thus gradually

being built and restored: a green European route between coastal towns and neighbouring countries.

Šmartinsko Jezero Tourist Area

As part of the Šmartinsko Jezero Tourist Area project, involving the construction of a path around the reservoir and the building of a bridge, for which the City of Celje successfully applied for European regional development funds, a pontoon bridge has been built just outside Celje. This Swiss-built 200-metre-long crossing represents something of a rarity on lakes and reservoirs. A prefabricated wooden structure is attached at either side to a wooden deck and supported on pontoons. The reservoir itself, Šmartinsko Jezero, is one of Celje's



New bridge in Sečovelje

tourism potentials and therefore in October the municipality, the Celeia Celje Institute and other partners decided to publish a book entitled The Gastronomic Challenges of Šmartinsko Jezero, offering an insight into the rich cultural heritage of this area and announcing that the future of the area around Šmartinsko Jezero also lies in the well-organised promotion of gastronomy based on everything that the region produces.

It would be impossible to imagine modern life without bridges, but bridges do not have to be merely structures that connect opposite banks: they can also have a broader social meaning. They are places where lovers meet, locking their love to a steel cable with a padlock, points of linguistic connection between two nations, a nod to culture and history. •



TRADITIONAL HERITAGE IN STEP WITH THE TIMES

Hana Souček Morača Photo Darinka Mladenovič, gallery Skrina

Ljubljana's Old Town is just a short distance away from the Prešeren statue, across the Triple Bridge. A series of picturesque little squares and façades with centuries of heritage, squeezed between the Castle Hill and the river Ljubljanica, reveal their charm. A number of art galleries invite tourists in for a taste of art and culture.

The City Art Museum Ljubljana, an international crossroads of cultural cooperation

The City Art Museum Ljubljana in Mestni Trg (Town Square) near the Town Hall is the largest fine art exhibition space in Ljubljana and has an almost 50-year tradition. The gallery's exhibition programmes are based around presentations of the work of established artists, exhibitions by young artists, and cooperation with other cities, related institutions in other countries, and

foreign artists. The results of this cultural cooperation are evident in a long series of international exhibitions, including numerous exhibitions by foreign artists in Ljubljana and solo and group exhibitions by Slovenian artists in Wiesbaden, Leverkusen, Seoul, Augsburg, Trieste, Novi Sad, Sarajevo, Karlstadt, Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Budapest, Podgorica and Zagreb. According to gallery director Alenka Gregorič, a special feature of the City Art Museum is its position as part of a new institution called Museums & Galleries of Ljubljana, where they face

the challenge of how to connect a gallery space that is primarily involved with contemporary art to a space involved with museum activities. An example of this is the interdisciplinary exhibition by 24 artists entitled Word For Word, Without Words, which in Gregorič's opinion is a step towards connecting the gallery and museum spaces at a practical level, since the exhibition features works of contemporary art alongside museum artefacts dating from the (Roman) Emona period to the 19th century. The exhibition takes place in October as part



of the 'Ljubljana: World Book Capital 2010' project. Ljubljana was named World Book Capital by UNESCO in April 2010.

From the Town Hall, follow the cobbled street past houses with a patina of age to the Galerija Mak in Mestni Trg, where you can buy paintings, sculptures and crafts products. 'The gallery aims to present Slovenian artists: we want to present Slovenia,' says Nives Stergar Vrčon who, together with business partner Alenka Drnovšek, has been selecting and presenting works by more than 70 artists for the last eight years. This diversity contributes to the variety and originality of the works of art on sale in the gallery.

Passing through Ljubljana's smallest square, Ribji Trg (Fish Square), named after the fish market that stood on this site from the 16th to the 19th century, past one of the oldest houses in Ljubljana, with the date 1528 above its entrance, cross over the river and follow the embankment to Židovska Ulica, where

Foreigners do show interest in cultural happenings in Slovenia and are particularly enthusiastic about the type of gallery of which Ars is an example: about the fact that there is a varied selection and a little of everything.

you will find a pleasant combined gallery featuring works by Slovenian masters, young Slovenian artists and some foreign artists, mainly Italians. Galerija Exarte is the result of a merger of existing galleries

and occupies the premises of the former Galerija Lala. The new director Boris Žbona is responsible for international liaison and selecting younger artists. The selling gallery has a rich programme that includes established artists, classics of Slovenian art such as Mušič, Kregar, Mihelič, Jakac, Jama and Omerza, and newer names, a selection of younger artists, for example Simon Kajtna. 'We don't get many tourists in our gallery,' says manager Lilijana Kenda. 'It is more businessmen and people who come to us on recommendation.' She explains that the situation has improved considerably since the designation of a pedestrian zone, which is restoring to Ljubljana's Old Town its lost air of refinement. Just a few steps further on is Galerija Hest. The gallery began its activity in Maribor in 1989, before opening the Ljubljana gallery in 1993. The gallery has over 10 years' experience in selling works of art, organising exhibitions by domestic and foreign artists and advising customers



on the selection of art for homes and business premises. Another gallery, Hest 35, opened in October 2002. This is a selling gallery specialising in the works of Slovenian artists under 35. An exhibition is on view in the gallery premises once a month.

A gallery with tradition

Galerija Ars, near the Cobblers' Bridge (built between 1930 and 1931 to the plans of the Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik), which links little Jurčičev Trg (Jurčič Square) on one side of the river to the junction of Mestni Trg and Stari Trg (Old Square) on the other, has this year celebrated 30 years of activity and is one of the oldest selling galleries in Slovenia. Marking the gallery's thirtieth anniversary was a sale exhibition of eight chairs designed by the architect Janez Suhadolc and decorated by various artists. Profits from the sale were donated to the Association of Friends of Youth to help gifted children. Jelka Horvat, a member of the gallery's staff, explains that Slovenians are currently too narrowly tied to domestic productions to have well-developed cultural tourism, but foreigners do show interest in

cultural happenings in Slovenia and are particularly enthusiastic about the type of gallery of which Ars is an example: about the fact that there is a varied selection and a little of everything. Through its work, the gallery has become a valuable part of the identity of Slovenia's capital city, organising exhibitions and selling works of art, antiques, exclusive Slovenian design products, products of local cultural interest and artist's requisites.

A hint of cultural heritage

For 15 years, Etnogalerija Skriona at Breg 8 on the promenade by the Ljubljana, has been endeavouring to hold onto the skills of our ancestors and in this way preserve cultural heritage from being forgotten. Their products derive from Slovenian tradition but are enhanced and reimagined by contemporary design. They have given a new image to the traditional Slovenian step stool, a successful export product particularly in Japan, and to lace from Idrija, where the traditional white has been replaced by a rainbow palette of colours. 'We have a lot of products that you will only find here, such as key fobs featuring miniature figures wearing traditional costumes



from the different regions of Slovenia, puzzles showing views of Slovenia and T-shirts featuring designs by the artist Ejti Štih,' explains the gallery manager Milena Ivanovič who, as well as running the gallery is involved, with Blaž Telban, in the organisation of various events connected to Slovenia's folk tradition.

Within its activity in the sphere of contemporary photography, Galerija Photon devotes particular attention to connections with the countries of central and south-eastern Europe. Their aim, they explain, is to popularise photography and keep their target public informed. During October the gallery's premises on Križevniška Ulica are hosting a solo exhibition by the



Hungarian photographer Anikó Robitz, who deals mainly with abstraction in black-and-white photography. In addition to its gallery activities, Photon is involved in festivals and together with partners organises 'Photonic Moments – Month of Photography', which returns to Cankarjev Dom in October.

Križevniška Ulica leads uphill from the Ljubljana to the Križanke complex. Originally the church and monastery of the Teutonic Knights, Križanke was remodelled by Jože Plečnik in 1952 and is today an important summer cultural venue. Nearby is the Galerija Equrna, which was the first private gallery in Yugoslavia when it was founded in 1982. It has occupied its premises on Gregorčičeva Ulica since 1984. Gallery director Taja Vidmar Brejc explains that what makes

Križevniška Ulica leads uphill from the Ljubljana to the Križanke complex. Originally the church and monastery of the Teutonic Knights, Križanke was remodelled by Jože Plečnik in 1952 and is today an important summer cultural venue.

the gallery special is its desire to present artists working in traditional media, since 'visual accounts of contemporary artistic thought are already present in institutional galleries'. The gallery has notched up 350 exhibitions in its own premises and 50 exhibitions in other countries – in the USA, Europe and Australia. Galerija Equrna is also present at all major international art fairs

including Art Basel, the LA Art Fair, Art Forum Berlin, ARCO Madrid and Art Chicago. Two exhibitions are scheduled in October: Katja Sudec will be followed by Arjan Pregl. The gallery is also due to take part in Preview Berlin – The Emerging Art Fair with Mitja Ficko, a representative of the younger generation of painters. According to Vidmar Brejc, the gallery gets a lot of interest from tourists,

who account for half the visitors to its exhibitions. A stroll through Ljubljana's Old Town offers everything that its galleries offer. Unique heritage which, despite the desire for traditionalism, is in step with the times and therefore always remains homely and familiar to its visitors while at the same time constantly changing and renewing itself.

**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**



Butchers' Bridge
Photo Stane Jeršič