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A TASTE OF INDIGENOUS SLOVENIA: ITS TRADITIONS, CULTURE AND NATURE

Indigenous means being bound to a certain geographical location and connected to an original environment. Indigenous can refer to people, language, plants, animals, the environment and culture. In this issue we will focus on the story of Slovenia told through the lives of our ancestors, the environment Slovenia was in the past and what it remains to this day. One of the basic human needs is affiliation. So what do we belong to? What do we believe in in Slovenia?

Indigenusness is built step by step. The environment that surrounds us is not something to be overlooked: it inspires us all. And inspiration creates the history and the culture of a nation. Although some might consider the observation somewhat banal, our personalities are created by the smallest elements of our cultural and material environment. How clean is the air we breathe? How healthy is the water we drink? You are no doubt familiar with the phrase “You are what you eat”. And looking at Slovenia, we can proudly say that we live in an inspiring environment. Slovenia is a country with extensive forests, mountainous and hilly regions, a country of the sea and the sun, a country with an abundance of rivers and streams. But above all, Slovenia is also a country of friendly and hospitable people.

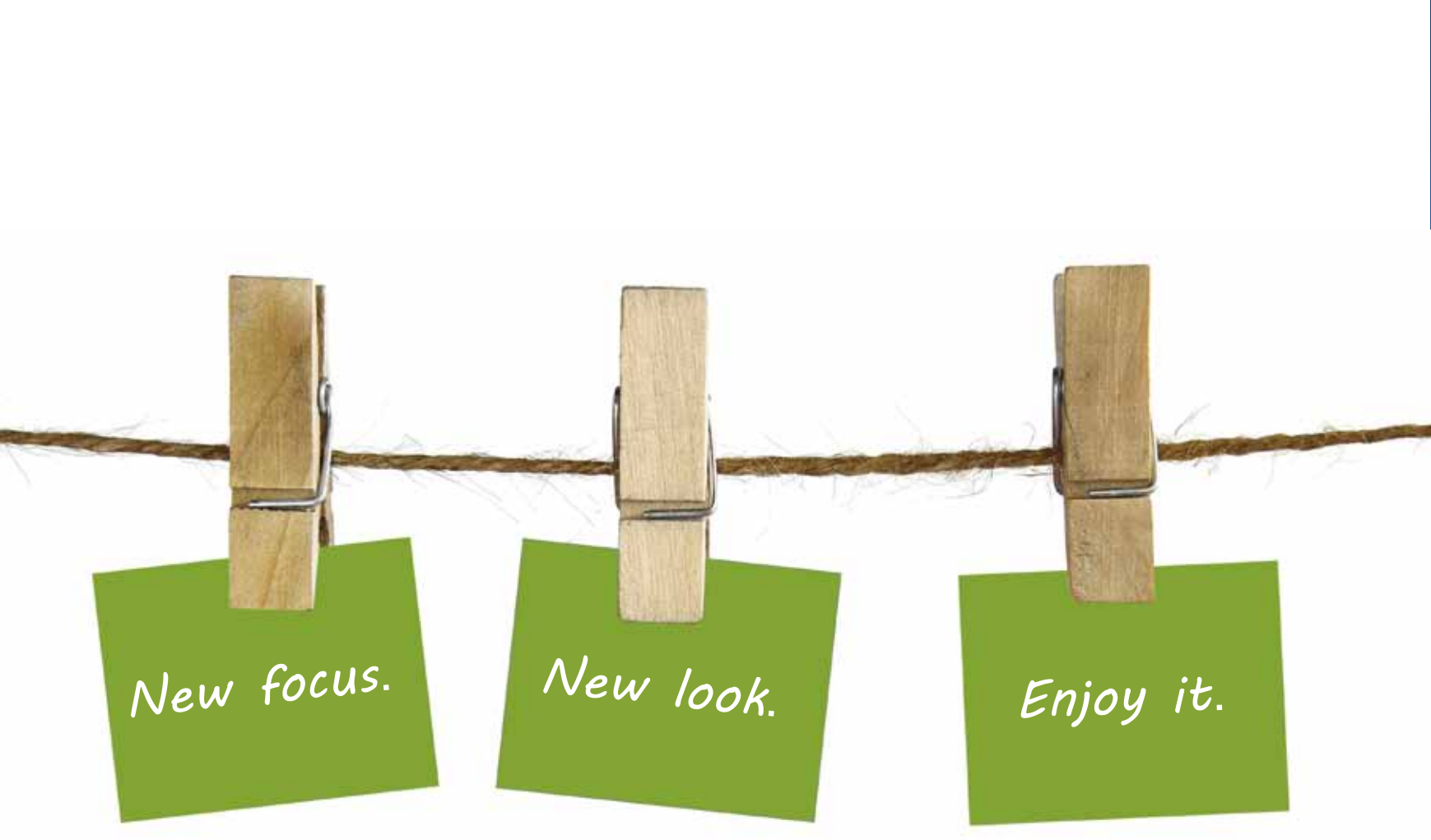
Slovenians have become increasingly interested in cultivating their gardens, growing their own vegetables and giving traditional gifts. They take pleasure in nature and the taste of home-made food. The human soul responds to collective models. It is interesting to observe how each of our body cells recalls the food we Slovenians ate in the past, the diseases that affected us and the way we lived our lives. This is our home, a place we feel well. Every nation needs things of its own, its own contents. And these must be indigenous. So rather than expecting tourists visiting Slovenia to discover them themselves, it is our duty to introduce these things and contents to them.

Tanja Glogovčan

Tanja Glogovčan, Executive Editor

- 8 THE GREEN FOREST
Slovenia's identity and greatest national treasure
- 25 ARCHITECT JULIJAN KRAPEŽ
Award-winning wood and stone furniture design
- 32 NATURE'S WONDERFUL CREATURES
Indigenous animal breeds of Slovenia
- 38 THE CARNIOLAN HONEYBEE
The First Lady of Slovenian Apiculture
- 44 BUCKWHEAT
Beneficial to people and excellent for bees
- 48 THE MAGICAL POWER OF HERBS
For every illness there grows a flower
- 52 HERBAL HOUSE
Nature is in the air
- 56 THE KARST BIODIVERSITY
As Below, So Above
- 60 HIKING
Favourite sport of Slovenians
- 64 THE HEALING POWER OF SPRING WATER
Slovenia: a land of natural spring waters
- 68 THE RIVER KOLPA
On the border between Slovenia and Croatia: home of otters, herons and eagles
- 78 THE ŠKOFJA LOKA PASSION PLAY
The oldest Slovene dramatic text
- 84 MODERN INTERPRETATION OF CLASSICAL LACE
Tina Koder Gajzer and Manca Ahlin, master lace-makers





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GREEN. ACTIVE. HEALTHY.

Slovenia is green, active and healthy. Slovenia always surprises everyone with its incredible natural and cultural diversity. The knowledge of ancestors is the cultural patrimony of the Slovenian nation. The many varieties of indigenous Slovenian seeds, the wealth of forest and water resources, and the respect for nature and culture enabled the Slovenian nation to survive through the centuries of its history. Slovenia is absolutely wonderful.

THE GREEN FOREST

Slovenia's identity and greatest national treasure

POLONA PREŠEREN, Photo: MOSTPHOTOS

In Slovenia, green is more than just a colour; it is 'Slovenian green'. It speaks of unspoilt nature and our focus on keeping it that way. It symbolizes the balance of lifestyle, our common vision to go forward with nature.

WHAT IS THE GREATEST THREAT TO SLOVENIAN FORESTS?

In addition to natural disasters (wind, glaze ice, snow), in recent years Slovenian forests have been mostly threatened by forest tree insect pests (mainly bark beetles), which is one of the most common causes of sanitary felling. On average, sanitary felling accounts for a third of the overall forest felling. This situation reduces the share of necessary tending cuts and, consequently, planned forest management, and at the same time weakens the bio-ecological stability of forests.

Slovenian green describes our focus on the elemental, on what we feel under our hands. It talks about the harmony of all the senses with which you can experience Slovenia. The memory of Slovenia combines the scent of the forest, the murmur of the brook, the remarkable taste of its water and the softness of wood. We feel Slovenia.

This is what we wrote back in 2007, when the Slovenian national brand was created. Green as the basic colour was a logical choice. Forest is the most characteristic type of ecosystem in Slovenia.

Forest is our greatest natural treasure. Forest provides us with an identity. Forest is our promise of a future and improves the quality of life.

As shown by opinion polls, almost 95 percent of Slovenians agree that forest is an essential component and co-creator of the Slovenian landscape. Slovenians want a clean natural environment, and the various effects of the forest are considered very important.

This is only natural since three-fifths of Slovenian territory are covered by forests. Slovenia is among Europe's most forested countries. It is the third most forested country in Europe after Finland and Sweden. For comparison, the world average of forest cover is about 30 percent and in Europe about 40 percent. It is also interesting that in 1875, forest covered only 36.4% of present-day Slovenia, but due to regrowth on abandoned agricultural land the forest area increased steadily over the last century. Now the Slovenian Forest Service observes that the increase in forest areas in Slovenia has mostly stopped after more than 130 years.

FOREST AS A VALUABLE NATURAL FEATURE

Forest is the habitat for many plant and animal species and thus also an important element in maintaining biodiversity. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, there are 69 indigenous tree species in Slovenian forests; the most common are beech and spruce. As a habitat, forest offers a variety of benefits owing to its multiple roles. Wood and forest fruits are among the most important ones, but the forest is also a place for recreation and relaxation, as well as work. It helps conserve clean drinking water and provides sequestration of carbon, thereby mitigating climate change. Our forests absorb around 7.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide, part of which is sequestered in wood, and produce

around 5.5 million tonnes of oxygen annually. They are an important source of carbon dioxide on the global scale. Anže Japelj, a researcher at the Slovenian Forestry Institute, believes that the forest, being an extremely important source of atmospheric CO₂, provides benefits to Slovenian industry, which thus has more emission credits available and does not need to buy them in the market.

Anže Japelj, who researches the economic aspects of forests, further explains that the vicinity of a forest improves the quality of life because it reduces external temperature fluctuations (milder summer heat waves and higher temperatures in winter), provides a place for recreation and enables contact between humans and nature. "All of the above is already recognised as a business opportunity by some large cities, as it has been shown that cities with more forests and green areas attract service-providing companies which generate a higher value added. Such an example is the development of London, where the strategy included planting a percentage of land with trees in order to retain the highly educated population that generally have higher incomes and spend more money. "The proximity of the forest not only improves the quality of life, but there is evidence that it also raises the price of real estate. Those properties which are less than 500 m away from the forest can have up to 6% higher value simply because of this fact," says Mr Japelj.

THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE FOREST

When a wood auction sale was held in Slovenj Gradec in February, the most expensive log of 'rebraš' sycamore maple was sold for EUR 11,313. The second best log sold was also that of a sycamore maple; both logs will be used to create musical instruments. The third most expensive log was spruce, which the owner sold for EUR 3,608. And why is this news important? Because it indicates the major economic importance of the forest.

Anže Japelj says that logs are the major tradable goods of Slovenian forests because "they account for about three-quarters of the value that comes from the forests. The remainder is represented by the wood used for energy purposes, most commonly used for heating (15%), and what are called non-timber forest products such as venison, wild honey, mushrooms, chestnuts and berries (10%)." Mr Japelj adds that approximately 40% of Slovenian households use biomass for heating.

The forest is also important in terms of tourism. "The success of a large number of tourist destinations depends on the large forest

presence and the fact that access to the forests is free for everyone, which is not the case in some other countries (e.g. in Italy). An increasing number of new recreational activities is taking place in the forest, which has a positive impact on the sale of leisure equipment", concludes Anže Japelj.

FOREST AND LEISURE

In Slovenia, forests are synonymous with quality of life, with recreational leisure activities which are extremely appreciated, and with a place of relaxation. In the middle of Ljubljana, the capital, there is Rožnik, Tivoli and Šišenski Hill Landscape Park, where 1.75 million visitors per year are recorded (hikers, joggers, cyclists, and more). Ljubljana is home to approximately 270,000 people.

An increasing number of Slovenians seek a quiet moment in the woods and spend their free time hiking, biking and engaging in other recreational activities.

Picking forest fruit is popular as well. Slovenians particularly enjoy picking mushrooms, chestnuts and blueberries. It is worth noting that the quantity of forest fruit that may be picked is restricted by law and is set at 1 kg for herbaceous plants (e.g. wild garlic and nettles). The restriction for all other fruits (e.g. mushrooms, blueberries, wild strawberries, chestnuts and mosses) is up to 2 kg. Plants that are protected may not be picked. Of course the instructions for safe movement in the woods must also be respected and the appropriate orientation equipment must be used when walking in unfamiliar woods. You should not forget to protect yourself against certain animals and, very importantly, you should not forget forest etiquette.

GROWING STOCK, INCREMENT AND FELLINGS

According to the Slovenian Forest Service, the forest growing stock is 327,500,000 cubic metres, or 276 cubic metres per hectare. The share of coniferous growing stock is 46.5% and the share of deciduous trees is 53.5%. The annual increment in Slovenian forests amounts to 8,000,000 cubic meters, or 6.7 cubic meters per hectare annually.



Green is the country's dominant colour.

Prof. dr. Andrej Bončina and **Prof. Dr. George Diaci** from the Bio-technical Faculty of Ljubljana University have shared their views on the values, social functions and peculiarities of Slovenian forests.

Which are the main values of Slovenian forests?

Forests in Slovenia have always been important for local populations for providing wood; timber production has been essential for many forest owners and also for rural development for the national economy. Due to the high proportion of forests and relatively well preserved forest ecosystems, forests in Slovenia are important for nature conservation of flora and fauna including the wolf, lynx and brown bear. The protective functions of forests have been highlighted due to the extreme site conditions and dispersed settlements, especially in the Alpine areas. Forests are important watersheds for most of the drinking water sources in Slovenia, and the importance of quality drinking water has been increasing in Slovenia and globally. The increased urbanization is reflected in the higher importance of the social functions of forests. People value forests in different ways depending on their living environment, their beliefs and needs. Given the wide range of specifics across different regions in Slovenia it is simply a necessity for forest planning to consider diverse natural, social and economic conditions. Therefore, multi-objective forest management is strongly emphasized, and is oriented to provide diverse forest ecosystem services across the land.

Which social functions do Slovenian forests provide?

Forests are a natural environment highly valued by people; therefore free access to all forests is of high societal importance. The proximity of forests adds to the living standards in many Slovenian cities. Which European city can boast such a close connection to the forest complex like Ljubljana with its nearby Rožnik and Golovec? Similar privileges also go for Maribor, Celje and many other Slovenian towns. Society is becoming more aware of the positive impact of forests on human health and well-being. Too often, these services have been taken for granted, partly due to the fact that 60% of Slovenia is covered by forests. However, many forest ser-

vices are not determined simply by the presence of forests in landscapes, but are strongly dependent on proper forest management coordinated by the Slovenia Forest Service.

Recreation in forests is becoming more valued; new forms of recreational activities are emerging such as various types of biking and horse riding that need to be managed to prevent conflicts. Similar issues are appearing regarding collection of non-wood forest products (e.g. mushrooms), which is highly popular among Slovenian people. Learning about forests is integrated into the educational programmes of kindergartens and schools, which is essential for shaping the culture and relationships between nature and young generations.

Which are the main specifics of forest management in Slovenia in comparison to the neighbouring countries?

In Slovenia close-to-nature forest management has been enacted since the mid-20th century. This has a major impact on all aspects of forestry. The same is true for Switzerland, Liechtenstein, South Tyrol as well as some German and Austrian federal states, which also abandoned clear felling due to sensitive mountain landscapes. Management of state forests in Slovenia is based on a ten-year inventory of the forests and elaboration of management plans that safeguard sustainable forest development and fulfilment of ecosystem services. A specific feature of Slovenia is the unique public forestry service for all forms of forest ownership. This means that planning for private forests is also quite intense, yet rational, because all work is carried out by the same institution – the Slovenia Forest Service.

Ownership of forests in Slovenia is highly fragmented, therefore it is not reasonable for every owner to organize their own forest inventory and management plans. This is financed by the state in return for free public access to the forests and their non-wood forest products and services. In recent years a number of forest owner associations have emerged, which are active in the marketing of wood.

Spend a whole day in the forest.



FOREST ETIQUETTE

Taking care of Slovenia's forests

IRENA KOGOJ, Source: SLOVENIA FOREST SERVICE
Illustrations: MARIJAN MOČIVNIK, STUDIO AJD

Forest flowers, mushrooms, forest fruits and moss are vital to the forest ecology and rules restrict what can be picked. Forests cover 59.8% of Slovenia's territory, which ranks the country as the third most forested country in the European Union (after Sweden and Finland).



Trees and bushes are living beings; you should respect them and cause them no harm. Tree names are becoming increasingly popular as Slovenian first names: Gaber (beech), Bor (pine), Jelka (fir), Tisa (yew), Brin (juniper).



Walking trails lead us through the forest, so please use them and do not go off trail. In Slovenia, there are around one hundred forest and natural science educational trails that teach about plants, animals, forestry, natural phenomena and traditional crafts.



Waste and rubbish do not belong in the forest. Clean up after yourself. Our forests absorb around 7.5 million tonnes of carbon dioxide and produce around 5.5 million tonnes of oxygen annually.



Lighting a fire in a forest area is forbidden as the fire could destroy trees and wildlife. There are 71 indigenous tree species in Slovenian forests: 61 deciduous and 10 coniferous. The most common tree species are beech and spruce.



Forest animals are very shy. Do not disturb them with noise. Keep your dog on a lead. The lynx is the most endangered species in Slovenian forests.



In forest areas, driving (if not prohibited by a special sign) is allowed only on roads. Do not leave your vehicle on any property, but rather ask the owner of the property for permission. 75% of Slovenian forests are privately-owned, 22% are state-owned, and 3% are municipality-owned.



Water is precious. Forests clean and store water and help to protect drinking water quality. Do not release any harmful substances into the water or soil. In Slovenia, virgin forests (forests whose composition and growth have remained virtually unaltered by people) cover around 540 hectares.





FOREST SELFNESS

Relax your mind, body and soul in the Cerkno landscape

DANILO GOLOB, Photo: BOJAN TAVČAR

Listen to the symphony of the forest. The rustling of winds high in the tree tops, the songs of birds, the trickling of the forest stream, the snapping of twigs under your feet and the sound of forest animals. The forest is waking up. Everything is turning green, turning into a blossoming carpet of hellebores, primroses, snowdrops and crocuses. The forest invites us to relax in its green embrace.

Relax and breathe with the forest.

A walk through the forest will help you escape from the hustle and bustle of city life and fill your lungs with fresh air. The team of the Local Tourist Organisation Laufar Cerkno used this concept to create the very first selfness programme, entirely conducted in nature – forest selfness in the Cerkno forests.

This is not a typical wellness programme, as it requires a person's conscious decision to take care of their health and happiness. The wonderful forest experience is complemented with a variety of activities using natural materials from local suppliers, such as wood, hay, clay, herbs and linen.

Since the programme's quality and development are inextricably linked to the local environment, culture and tradition, the authors of the forest selfness programme cooperate with other local providers of tourist services, producers and craftsmen.

The Forest Selfness project won the 2014 Snovalec award for the most innovative idea in Slovenian tourism given by SPIRIT Slovenia (Public Agency for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Development, Investment and Tourism).

LET GO AND ENJOY FOREST SELFNESS

"Visitors will enjoy a very special forest experience, a deep relaxation practice to balance body, mind and soul and a great learning opportunity," said Minca Slakonja, a member of the highly committed and creative forest selfness team. Experts in meditation, personal and spiritual growth, reflexotherapy and cuisine will take you for an hour-and-a-half's walk on an easy trail, stopping at thematic posts to relax and experience the healing power of nature. "Our visitors are impressed by the wonderful views of the picturesque Cerkno landscape. Walking barefoot on spruce needles as part of our natural reflexotherapy, tasting local and regional dishes served on hay placemats, learning the basics of reflexotherapy and clay foot massage, as well as pampering of tired feet in a hay flower soak, are only some of the unforgettable experiences," added Mrs Slakonja. Meditation exercises in the beech forest and a nice rest in a hammock during guided natural sound therapy will help you "switch off" and reach a deep state of relaxation.

Guests can choose between this short programme, or one that lasts six hours, and learn how to cope with stress and boost their health and vitality. But what is most important, by using all their senses, they experience an entirely new dimension of forests and nature.

All the visitors so far, whether from Slovenia or abroad, have loved the experience. Forest selfness is increasingly popular among foreign tourists, especially British and American travellers. Giacomo from Arizona, USA, commended the programme, saying: "A very good and relaxing programme which exposes you to other things than what others offer you. What I liked most was the food, which looked very special and tasted delicious, besides that it was healthy and suitable for vegetarians. I think that the programme is healthy for body, mind and soul." Although Erika from Izola, Slovenia, has often had the chance to admire the natural beauty of the Slovenian landscape, she found the programme excellent. What she liked best was walking on spruce needles, the sound therapy in the hammock and red clay massage.

NATURE HEALS US AND WE HEAL NATURE

Only natural materials are used for the forest selfness programmes that leave nature intact.

"Our mission is not only to raise awareness about the healing power of nature and its positive effects on a person's health and feelings, but to promote environment protection and life in harmony with nature," explained the members of the forest selfness team. Their motto is: "Nature gives what we give nature. Nature heals us and we heal nature." Describing their work, Mrs Slakonja said: "We help people recognise that forests enrich us, which is why we appreciate a visitor's comment that the programme made her see the forest from a different perspective. It means that we were successful."

They plan to organise forest selfness workshops and training courses in other locations across Slovenia. A shorter version of the programme for relaxation in the embrace of magnificent trees will be available in spring. Business collaboration with various partners, including Garden Village Bled, is in the pipeline, and a special version of forest selfness for children is being developed in cooperation with Cerkno Primary School. The first ever Selfness Week will be organised in Slovenia at the beginning of June and will include presentations and workshops about selfness and nature.



Treat your tired feet to a hay flower bath.

THE RADUHA BOARDING HOUSE IN LUČE

Dreaming and sleeping in a treetop

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, Photo: ARCHIVES OF THE RADUHA BOARDING HOUSE

The Raduha Boarding House in Luče, an idyllic Alpine village nestled between the mountains and the Savinja River at the mouth of the Logarska Valley offers its guests a different kind of accommodation, closer to nature. Have you ever spent the night in a hayrack, in a tree house or in a renovated old stable?

Probably not. Modern dwellings are made of brick, so for most people the night spent in a treetop or in a hayrack is really something special. As all human acts are associated with feelings and emotions, the purpose of this is to bring back the childhood memories of climbing trees and hayracks. Since Slovenian tourism focuses on adventures, the real attractions are those that offer something new every day.

The yearning for some remote time in the past brings the guests of this boarding house, which first opened its doors in 1875. back to that period. This makes the guests feel like they have come to spend their holidays with their grandmother in the country. It is a highly innovative getaway facility enjoyed by tourists from far and near. Tourists, like the two who recently arrived from the New York City, cannot admire enough the beautiful wooden cottages and their sophisticated design.

Due to the natural materials used in their construction, particularly wood, it is also an example of good corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices in tourism.

TRADITION AND MODERNITY GO HAND IN HAND

The current, fourth consecutive generation of the boarding house's management has combined tradition and modernity to make the facility a success, acclaimed by visitors with a great deal of admiration. Most of their guests come from France and Switzerland but also from Germany and Austria; they stay on average seven days.

The boarding house offers twelve beds in the hayrack, the tree house and the old stable and five standard double rooms in the central building.

There is also a number of Slovenian guests, despite the fact that prices are among the highest in this line in Slovenia. "Of course, our prices are higher since we have a different approach, use more expensive materials and offer organic food. Our guests from abroad are aware of the responsibility towards nature and the environment. Our guests make informed choices which are based on reason, not made at random" says Martina Breznik, the boarding house owner. "Slovenia offers so many small, boutique opportunities that are also embraced by our establishment and fascinate visi-



Last year, the Spirit agency bestowed on the Raduha Boarding House the Sejalec (Sower) Award for its creative and innovative achievements in tourism.

tors. Tourists increasingly appreciate nature, authenticity and social responsibility, which is easier to provide in small tourist facilities. Top-notch cuisine and the opportunities for active leisure also play an important role.

THE LOVE OF FORMS, COLOURS, SCENTS AND FLAVOURS

The culinary skills of the previous generations have been handed down to the fourth generation of the family. The current culinary offer is just a continuation of and reflects the respect for the culinary mastery of Martina's mother, grandmother and great-grandmother. "The guiding principle of my work is the love of forms, colours, scents and flavours. It is no coincidence that the expression GOOD TASTE, original tasting, has acquired a general meaning in all branches of art and in the life itself. I strive to make my dishes speak for themselves and on my behalf. It is through the quality of the food that I offer our guests a piece of nature with all its shades in my own, seasoned way", the landlady says.

In one way or another, continued imagination and resourcefulness are an integral part of the nature of the cooking profession. In a desire to combine culinary knowledge, tradition and innovation, Martina is in a constant search of new ideas and flavours. And tradition is the richness and value added that are deeply cherished and passed on to the younger generation.

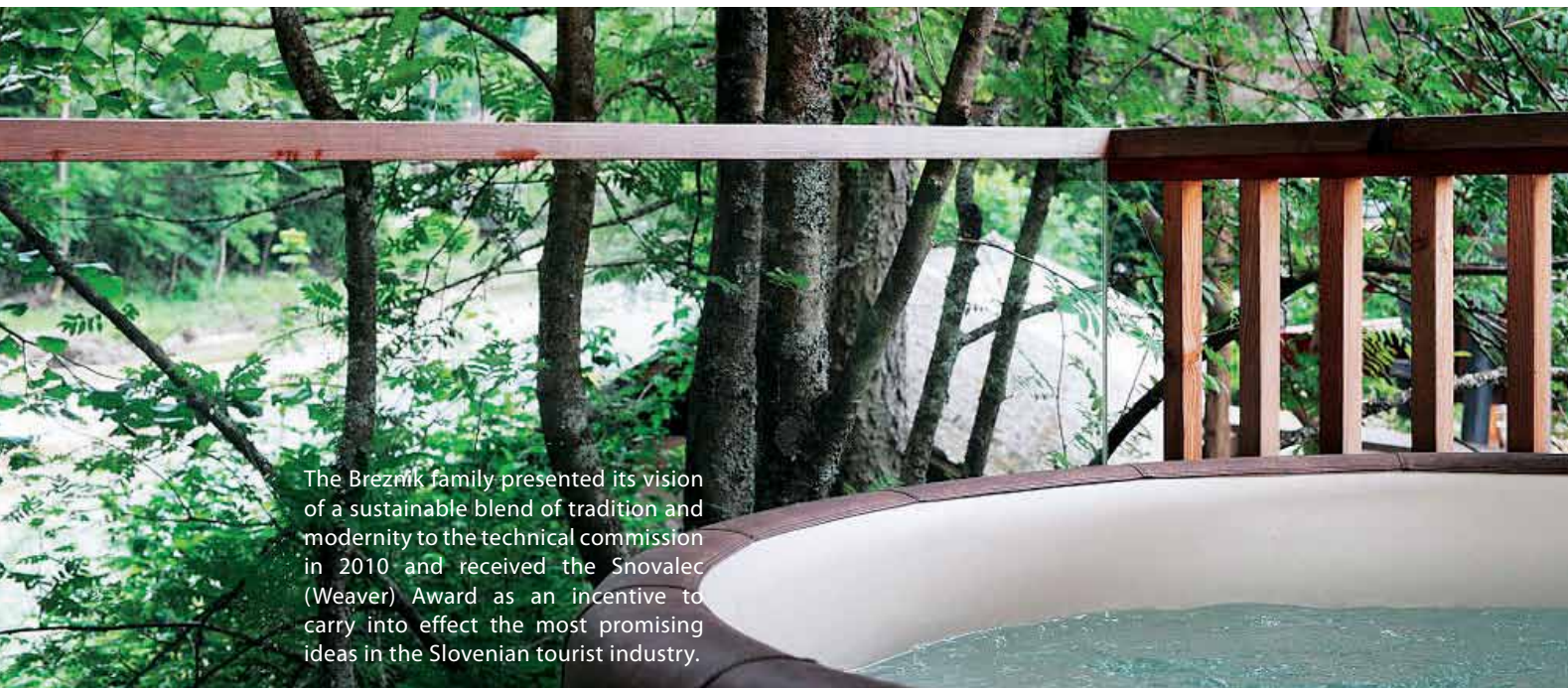
THE ENVIRONMENT OFFERS A HOST OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR DEVELOPMENT

Martina believes that Slovenian tourism offers many untapped opportunities by combining tradition and modernity. "I will soon have a lecture on local food production in the context of sustain-

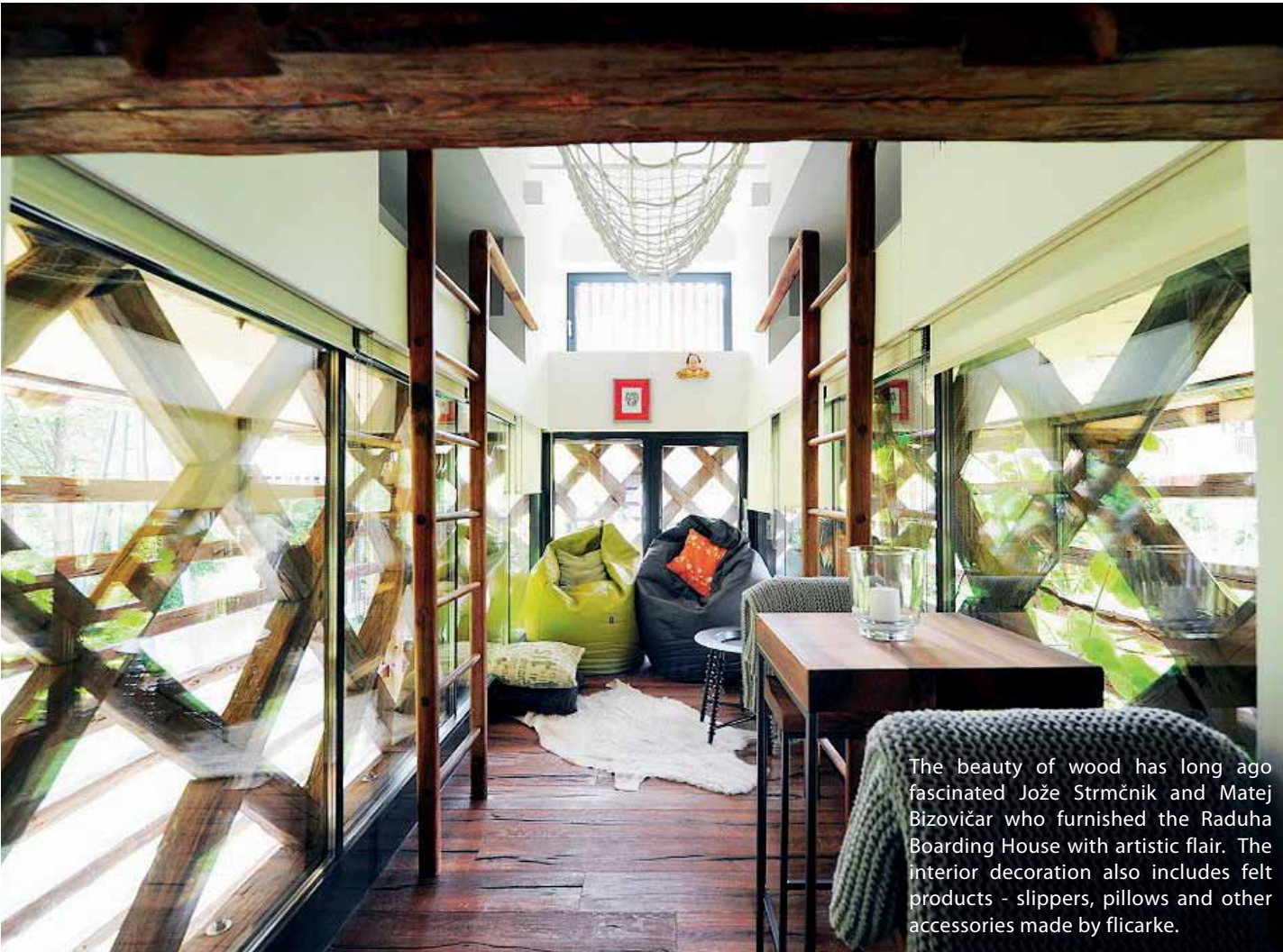
able rural development in which I would like to highlight the new employment opportunities which are more abundant than we can imagine; they only need to be identified. For example, local food production, such as lamb produced in the Solčava-Jezersko area, various cheeses and other types of meat. We have a rich tradition and there are many untapped opportunities, particularly in food production. Fortunately, the environment offers a host of opportunities for development that only need to be identified."

In the search for original and innovative products and services, the Breznik family plans also include opening a shop to sell organic products under their own brand name, and a sauna which has long been in demand.

But this does not exhaust the list of new investments; on the contrary the family still have plenty of ideas up their sleeves. Their hospitality range will continue to be sustainably based with a sense for origin, tradition and natural and cultural heritage. Their guests will continue to enjoy peace, relaxation, unique accommodation, individually tailored trips throughout Slovenia, excellent food, homely ambience and ecological wood architecture. Visitors have long been attracted to the region for its forests, lush greenery, good food and long breakfasts, usually in the company of Mr and Ms Breznik, Ms Breznik's mother or the family's three children of which the youngest son, Filip, is already well involved in the family business. The family's notable business achievements also include the association with the renowned boarding house run by Joško Sirk in Goriška Brda, which has a similar range of services.



The Breznik family presented its vision of a sustainable blend of tradition and modernity to the technical commission in 2010 and received the Snovalec (Weaver) Award as an incentive to carry into effect the most promising ideas in the Slovenian tourist industry.



The beauty of wood has long ago fascinated Jože Strmčnik and Matej Bizovičar who furnished the Raduha Boarding House with artistic flair. The interior decoration also includes felt products - slippers, pillows and other accessories made by flicarke.

Luče is an idyllic Alpine village nestled between the mountains and the Savinja River. Due to its remoteness and inaccessibility, it gave birth to many stories in the past that continue to stir up imagination. Luče was named after the lights (torches) carried by forest nymphs when looking for the lost sheep in the deep forests. The surrounding hills attract visitors with their superb view of the valleys and the neighbouring peaks. Visitors enjoy pristine natural beauties and silence interrupted only by birdsong. The Logarska Valley is one of the most beautiful Alpine glacial valleys. As a blend of nature with tradition, this landscape park boasts rich natural heritage, from meadow flowers to high mountain animals. It is a good starting point for visiting the high peaks of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, bicycling, mountain climbing, photo hunting, alpinism, skiing, cross country skiing and ice climbing.

ARCHITECT JULIJAN KRAPEŽ

Award-winning wood and stone furniture design

TANJA GLOGOVČAN

Julijan Krapež is an architect and a designer from Ljubljana who has won a number of prizes for his furniture made of wood – and now stone too. He designed a Spruce and Terrazzo Kitchen in collaboration with Potočnik Furniture, and it won him four prizes and awards at the Ambient Ljubljana–Furniture Fair. To date, nobody has gained so many awards for a single product. This success is purely Slovenian and here the story begins of an engaging challenge.

The award-winning and admired Spruce and Terrazzo Kitchen is primarily distinguished for successfully integrating Slovenian tradition and the use of wood and stone. Traditions of home environment, Slovenia, provide a starting point and emanate from the work of designer Julijan Krapež.

WOOD AS A SYMBOL OF SLOVENIA

Spruce and Terrazzo Kitchen is made of a spruce and ground concrete terrazzo, the material much used by the Slovenian architect Jože Plečnik. Krapež designed this mid-priced kitchen in pursuit of bringing design furniture as close as possible to a wider audience in Slovenia and elsewhere. But this has not been his only objective: "Basically, it is about designing in wood, which has an ancient tradition in Slovenia. Of all different types of wood I should mention walnut and lime-wood.

Julijan Krapež graduated from the Faculty of Architecture in Ljubljana under Professor Janez Suhadolc. He continued his studies at the Venice Faculty of Architecture. He has become renowned primarily as a furniture designer. For a number of years he worked as a designer for the Ajdovščina Furniture Factory. He works as a freelance designer; in 2009, he started to combine his design solutions with the technical knowledge of Potočnik Furniture, a company which was also involved in the Spruce and Terrazzo Kitchen production.

The lime tree is also a symbol of the Slovenian nation.

Lime-wood used to be most widely utilised, primarily in churches. I also love to work with elm, which has become scarce in Slovenian forests. From a designer's point of view, mountain maple and oak are also interesting. I hope our customers buy the furniture I design together with Potočnik Furniture also because of the high quality of Slovenian wood. Spruce is a very useful though low price wood, which may be the reason for the somewhat dismissive attitude towards it."

GOURMET PANTRIES AND PLACES

"I believe I can create a world-class design and produce a bestseller through the added content value drawn from the Slovenian tradition. Besides being an ensemble of individual units, furniture should also be rich in its content. That is why I added a bread cradle (men-trga or vintla) to the kitchen's cooking unit," the Slovenian architect explains. A bread cradle is a wooden basin with a lid used by the housewives at the end of the 19th century for storing flour and kneading dough, the lid was used for its rolling. This is the starting point of a furniture revolution as planned by Krapež: "It is my vision that the furniture user will no longer store all things in one cupboard but will distribute them to separate individual components. These components may incorporate parts of furniture embracing Slovenian methods of making sausages, spirits, storing meat, etc. This includes items familiar to us from Slovenian tradition but no longer used in daily life. We can humorously name them "gourmet pantries and places". This is our wealth, by appropriately promoting this story we can achieve great success in foreign markets. Hence, Krapež furniture gives flavour to the form and form to the flavour. Krapež admits that in terms of content his idea translates into a very demanding project which will in the future include not only a designer and furniture maker but will also demand cooperation with an ethnologist, ethnographer, and a historian.

He is obviously talking about those individual customers who are not satisfied with mass-produced goods but value the quality of wood and form. Indeed, in most cases customers furnish the newly built dwelling units or houses of historical value, but Krapež does not forget apartment buildings: "Functionality with the same content is also a challenge. A modern design with traditional elements." At present, Krapež and Potočnik Furniture unique sets are only produced as ensembles and not as individual components, but this type of pro-

duction is included in their short-term plan. "Components like the bread cradle can be a perfect accessory to industrially produced furniture. It is, of course, more perfect if the entire component is unique; nonetheless, these traditional elements for bread making, sausage drying, cured meats, spirits and wine storing, etc. are a content-rich piece of furniture.

The most important thing is that we not only design furniture produced in Slovenia but also made of Slovenian wood, conveying a message about Slovenians.



Stone and Wood Kitchen, detail from *The Taste of Form* multimedia show, brushed larch and Lesno Brdo natural stone, manufactured by: Pohištvo Potočnik, 2012.

That part of this line is also offered at prices affordable to a wider range of customers."

PERSONAL APPROACH AND TECHNOLOGICAL PERFECTION

The style of furniture by Krapež, primarily of the kitchens he started to design in 2009, draws on fine arts principles and places an explicit emphasis on the basic materials: wood and stone. "I very much like to use this combination. In this, I am inspired by Plečnik; I also greatly value my professor, architect Janez Suhadolc. There are fewer and fewer quarries in Slovenia, but you can still find some. There is beautiful stone found in Slovenia, for example Karst natural stone Repen, Lesno Brdo limestone, Pohorje tonalite and Hotavlje marble."

Julijan Krapež and Potočnik Furniture tandem is intrigued by design's individuality achieved through personal approach and technical perfection. "We pay particular attention to details and joints which have an important aesthetic function." Krapež points out: "I would like to devote even more attention to explicit statuary and painting details reflecting Slovenian tradition, of course. I would include them into the furniture components in expected or completely unexpected ways. You open a drawer and see a painting. I'm also attracted by the idea of a furniture ensemble incorporating not only the Slovenian tradition of furniture components, but also "drawers full of Slovenian utensils (for example rolling pin).

I also find ecological awareness very important. The world is drowning in hyper-production, artificial materials and processing. I promote ecological oiling and waxing; if varnish is used, it must be water-based.

Why would a glowing brilliance be needed? I myself find nothing wrong with a cut or drop I notice while sitting at a table. They speak about the life of the people under the roof sheltering this table.

SLOVENIA CANNOT BE OVERLOOKED

The rooms furnished with such kitchens and such furniture have souls. Designers like Krapež aspire to entice wood and stone to mirror the Slovenian soul. I am convinced that their vision will also be recognised when they enter foreign markets. Slovenia has excellent wood, quality stone and, according to Julijan Krapež, many good designers. Slovenia is a beautiful, unique and special country. Its green and diverse environment imbued with a warm sense of spirituality can hardly be overlooked.



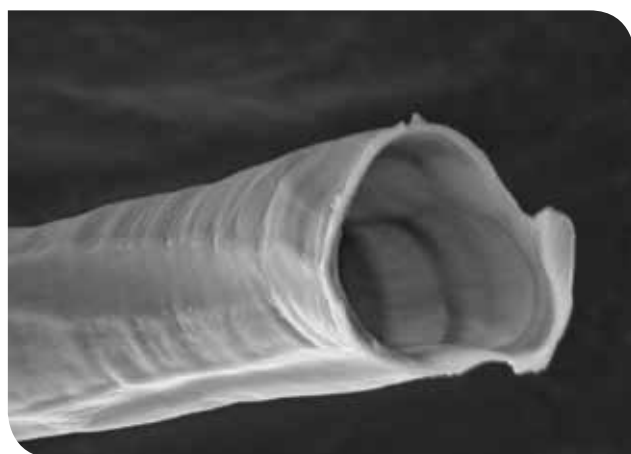
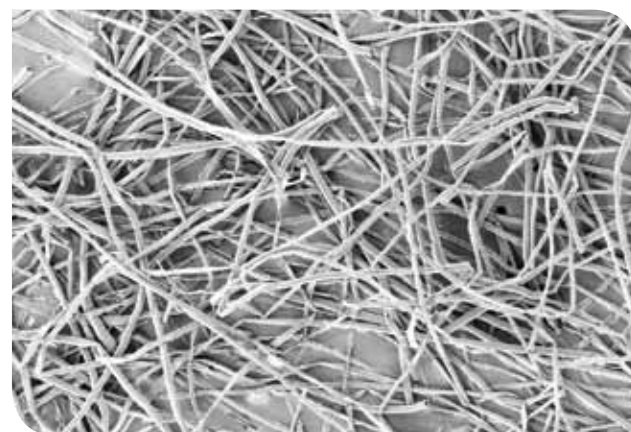
Mentrga table – Spruce and Terrazzo Kitchen, solid spruce and terrazzo, manufactured by: Pohištvo Potočnik, 2014.

Wood Kitchen, brushed ash veneer, solid steamed acacia and pointed Repen stone, manufactured by: Pohištvo Potočnik, 2013.

INSOL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT COMPANY

Poplar Seed Fibres are Important also in Medicine

UROŠ MAHKOVEC
Photo: INSOL ARCHIVES



It is quite possible that Insol will promote simple poplar seed fibres as a substance with an important role in medicine. This will crown the research activities in examining the carriers of active ingredients that enable their controlled release. The material is useful in the production of smart medical supplies and patches. Certain ideas also concern the replacement of the synthetic nanocellulose in surgical implants.

Just like in most innovations, in this case the discovery was made by chance – with the help of a curious girl. The owner's daughter Ines Likon, a secondary school student, called her father's attention to the importance of poplar fibres, by which poplar seeds are dispersed around by the wind. Her father discovered that poplar fibres are actually nanotubes with great absorbing and insulating properties. He patented the idea in Slovenia, through WIPO, as well as in China.

A STRATEGIC TREE

The innovation is in the use of nano materials, this is a substance that contains structures, particles or composites whose size does not exceed 100 nm in any dimension and which has the properties of a nanomaterial. Owing to their extremely small scale, the properties of nanomaterials significantly differ from those of conventional materials. Although several nanomaterials had been discovered even before 1985, the discipline's development was fuelled in particular by the discovery of carbon nanoparticles – fullerenes.

In terms of their structure, poplar fibres are cellulose nanotubes coated with a thin layer of natural waxes. The specific feature of these nanotubes is that they are highly effective in absorbing oily liquids, while at the same time they repel water with equal effectiveness.

Based on their findings on the structure of poplar seed fibres, Insol developed absorbent materials for cleaning oil spills as well as for insulation in ultralight transport packaging materials.

In cooperation with experts from the Jožef Stefan Institute, Insol is also involved in developing antibacterial patches for long-term use.

RECIPIENTS OF NUMEROUS AWARDS

Insol has ten applied patents. Two of these are supported by the European Agency for Competition and Innovation. The company has been the recipient of national and international awards in the development of advanced materials and the implementation of quality in research practice. In 2013, they received the Natural

Fibrenamic Award, Century International Quality ERA Award and European Award for Best Practice. The company has implemented and follows TQM 1000 quality standard. Currently, it takes part in the European project on stabilisation of organic carbon in bio-charcoal under the working name of Eco-Bis, together with partners from Austria, Belgium and Hungary. The company says that the most important awards were those received for its work, i.e. the Fibrenamics Award and the Energy Globe Award, both received in 2011.

SUPPORT FOR DEVELOPMENT

Ecology and environmental protection are the core activities of the INSOL company. In addition, they are also involved in waste processing and the research and marketing of analysis applications and devices; they have their own know-how in industrial chemical polymerisation technologies, they manage production, prepare technological and technical documentation for setting up production capacities, and develop technologies for waste and wastewater processing.

In 2013, Insol became a member and co-owner of the IME Consortium in the framework of each it operates as a R&D company. IME was established with the aim of promotion and distribution of poplar seed fibres as a strategic material. Additional information is available at www.ime-eco.eu.

A distinctive feature of the company is its research and innovations in green technologies, fact functioning as a kind of micro-enterprise for green inventions.

Insol's guiding principle is to provide assistance to small and medium-sized businesses that do not have their own development and technological personnel. At the clients' request, they provide assistance in obtaining development funds for project implementation. They call themselves "a company of whys", as the interrogative "why" opens the door to new challenges. A major share of their profit is earmarked for research and development. The company networks the best experts in the area of sustainable development, ecology and advanced materials. In their case, the research practice is successfully complemented with quality. This Slovenian company is active both in the domestic as well as in foreign markets.

NATURE'S WONDERFUL CREATURES

Indigenous animal breeds of Slovenia

DANILA GOLOB

Sometimes one cannot help but wonder at the rich variety of animals that share our living space. Slovenia has fourteen indigenous breeds of nine domestic animal species.

There are three indigenous horse breeds (the Lipizzaner, the Posavski horse and the Slovenian cold-blooded horse) and four sheep breeds (the Bovec sheep, the Istrian pramenka, the Bela Krajina pramenka and the Jezersko-Solčava sheep), while other species boast a single indigenous representative: the Karst Shepherd dog, cika cattle, the Drežnica goat, the Krškopolje pig, the Štajerska hen, the Soča trout and the Carniolan bee. So there's a true Slovenian animal kingdom!

And did you know that three predators (bear, wolf and lynx) also live in Slovenia? Or that the Postojna Cave is the home of a mysterious creature, the largest permanently cave-dwelling animal in the world?

A BABY DRAGON

The olm is the only vertebrate in Europe that lives solely in the subterranean world and its size of 25 to 30 centimetres makes it the largest such animal in the world. The tailed amphibian belongs to the ancient family of Proteidae. Its skin lacks any protective pigmentation, the blood showing through it making the animal a very pale pink in colour.

People have often wondered whether the olm might in fact be a mythical creature, as it reminded them of a baby dragon.

An olm can live for up to 120 years. So what is the secret to its eternal youth? First, it has great regenerative capacity, being able to replace a lost limb with a new one. And an olm can survive for up to 10 years without food. But scientists are still looking for answers to many questions relating to the mysterious animal. Those working in the Postojna Cave are aware of the uniqueness of the olm. This is why they were particularly excited when a female laid 30 eggs in August 2013: "Unfortunately, no 'baby dragon' managed to hatch, despite our extreme care. We were very disappointed, of course, although this is a rather common occurrence according to scientific research," says Katja Dolenc Batagelj, executive marketing director at the Postojna Cave.

AN ENDANGERED BEAUTY FROM THE SOČA RIVER

The Soča trout is a freshwater fish living primarily in the River Soča, from which it got its name, and its tributaries; it is also found in the rivers of the Adriatic Sea catchment area. Smaller fish live in water of medium depth, while larger ones stay in the deep pools, mostly alone.

The Soča trout is the most endangered fish species in Slovenia.

It is threatened by water pollution, destruction of the natural environment and particularly by crossbreeding with the brown trout, which was introduced into its environment at the beginning of the 20th century. The Soča trout protection programme, implemented in the upper Soča, managed to improve knowledge of the trout's biology and ecology and of the number of trout species in the river. By breeding pure populations and catching brown trout, fishermen are striving to make the Soča trout the prevalent species in the river again.

THE ROYAL HORSE

The Lipizzaner is one of the oldest cultural horse breeds in the world. The name of the breed is derived from Lipica, its point of origin in the Slovenian Karst. The cradle of the Lipizzaner is the Lipica Stud Farm, established by the Habsburg Archduke Charles II in 1580. The Lipizzaner is a harmoniously built, elegant and noble horse of medium frame suitable for performing classic dressage elements, riding and coach-drawing. It has a benevolent nature and a vivacious temperament.

Lipica trains first-class horses for the Spanish Riding School, where they demonstrate the haute école or "high school" movements of classical dressage. This is the highest degree of training that a horse can achieve.

It is an extremely demanding equestrian art whose movements are based on those naturally performed by the horse when at liberty. Lipizzaners are made to measure for this and are certainly the best at it of all breeds of horse.

In October 2008, Slovenia was visited by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. On this august occasion, a lot of thought went into what a suitable present for Her Majesty might be. The symbolic presentation of a prized Lipizzaner stallion turned out to be a good choice, and one with repercussions, too, as the stallion is still frequently visited at protocol events. The horse, 085 Favory Canissa XXII, was symbolically handed to Queen Elizabeth II on her visit to Lipica. Al-

though now owned by the British monarch, he has remained in the care of the Lipica Stud Farm. One of the most promising Lipizzaner stallions at the time he was given to Queen Elizabeth, Favory Canissa XXII has continued to be successful to this day, regularly appearing in the classical riding school of Lipica, where only the most beautiful and best-trained stallions perform. He has also met the professional expectations as a breeding stallion, having sired a large number of foals. The Queen's stallion, who will turn 23 this year, is still one of the fieriest and most vivacious Lipizzaners, the Lipica Stud Farm reports!

THE GUARDIAN OF THE HERD

The Karst Shepherd is a centuries-old dog breed. Karst Shepherds were used as shepherd dogs in the area of Slovenian Karst, most commonly around Pivka. The breed was even mentioned by Janez Vajkard Valvasor in his famous book The Glory of the Duchy of Carniola. Valvasor described Karst Shepherds as strong and intrepid dogs bred in the area of the River Pivka. The breed was internationally acknowledged in 1939 as the Illyrian Shepherd and finally in 1968 under the name used today. The animals were bred and spread

by shepherds who needed strong and intrepid dogs to protect their herds from predators.

The Karst Shepherd is an efficient guardian and protector of the flock. Loyal and incorruptible, it will perform its duty unwaveringly.

It can also make a suitable family dog, characterised by great commitment to its master and other family members. Today the breed is found all across Slovenia and is in fact the only indigenous Slovenian dog breed.

PREDATORS IN SLOVENIA

There are not many countries in Europe with as many as three large predatory species living on their territory. Slovenia is one such! Brown bear, lynx and wolf are rare and protected inhabitants of our forests. They are threatened by the spreading of inhabited areas into their

living space, unregulated grazing of small ruminants, road transport and other human interventions into nature.

The biggest predator in Slovenia is the brown bear, which can be found especially in the forests in the south of the country.

According to professional estimates, the number of brown bears living in Slovenia is about 400. The bear is difficult to spot, as it is a highly vigilant animal with good hearing and sense of smell. It retreats when it senses a human presence, only becoming a danger to people when it is surprised or approached too closely. It is very important as predator, being called a keystone species: thus the protection of the brown bear and its territory helps preserve other species too.

The lynx, the largest European feline species, was eradicated from Slovenia in the early 20th century, but six lynxes from Slovakia were released in Kočevski Rog forests in 1973. The reintroduction of the

lynx to Slovenia is considered one of the most successful in Europe. Lynx are characterised by their reddish-grey fur marked with dark brown spots, tufts of hair on the tips of their ears and their short, black-tipped tails. They are shy animals that are difficult to encounter. But even if you do meet one, do not be afraid – lynx are not dangerous to humans.

Slovenia also preserved the wolf, which lives in the woods of Kočevsko and Notranjska.

According to professionals (from the SloWolf project), about 39 wolves live in Slovenia in 8 to 11 packs. The structure of the packs is always similar, taking the form of a family: father, mother and their offspring of different ages. The wolf is not considered to be dangerous to people: no cases of human injuries caused by wolves have been confirmed in Slovenia, although several encounters between humans and wolves take place annually.



Photo: Lipica Stud Farm archives



Photo: Luka Hojnik

The Soča trout is much larger than other trout species, reaching up to one metre in length. It has a large head and a characteristic marbled pattern on its grey and white skin. The pattern may be dark grey, brown, olive green, copper red or even brown and yellow. Some Soča trout have red spots that merge with the marbled pattern.

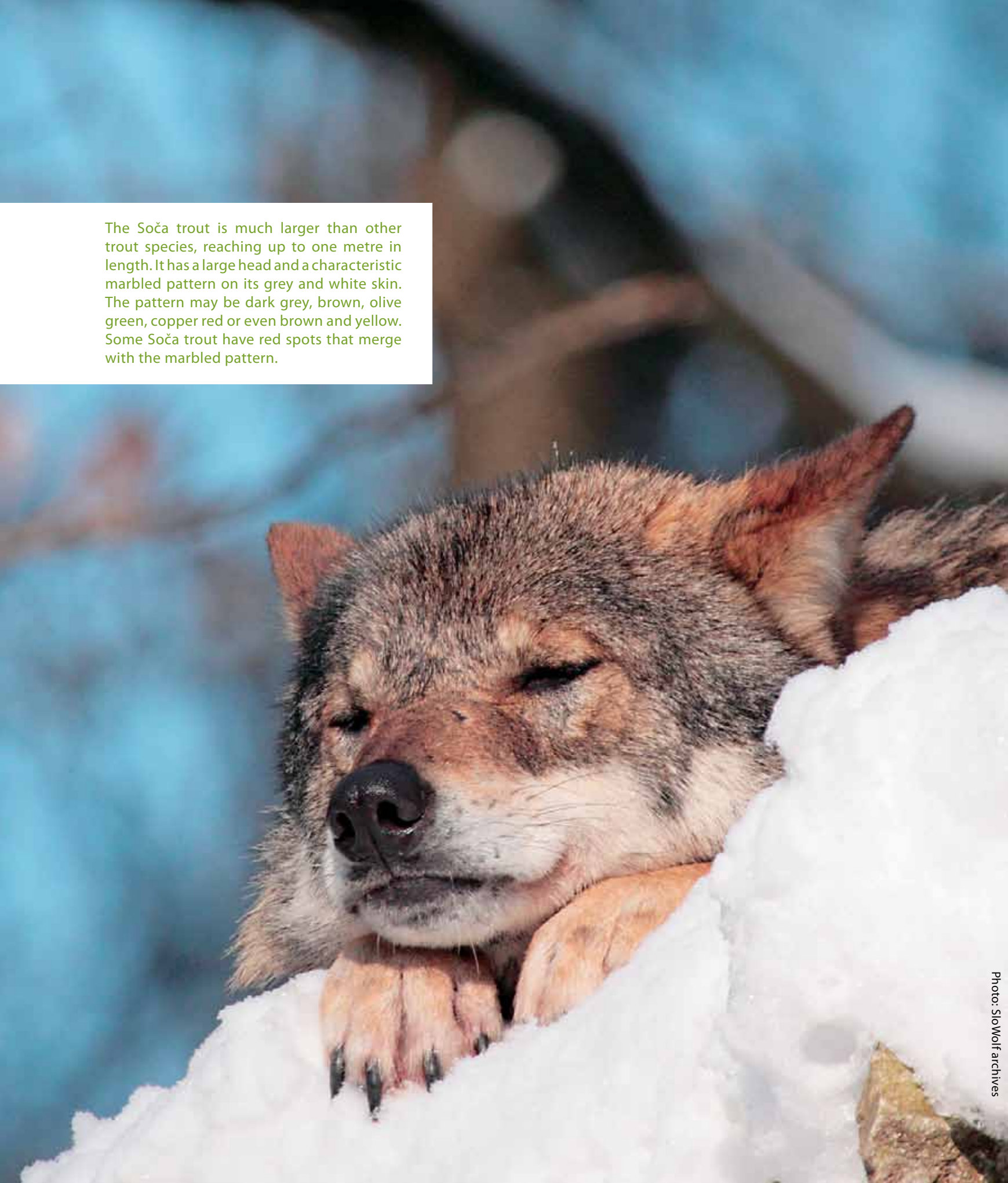


Photo: SloWolf archives

THE SLOWOLF PROJECT RANKS AMONG THE BEST EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENTAL PROJECTS

The project of conservation and surveillance of the conservation status of the wolf population in Slovenia (SloWolf) has been selected as among the best projects of the EU LIFE programme. The LIFE award ceremony will take place on 4 July in Brussels in the context of the Green Week event.

The SloWolf project was carried out at the University of Ljubljana from 2010 to 2013 in collaboration with the Slovenian Forest Service and the Dinaricum Society. The goals of the project were the long-term conservation of the wolf population, its main prey and habitats in Slovenia and improvement of the coexistence of wolf and man.

THE CARNIOLAN HONEYBEE

The First Lady of Slovenian Apiculture

POLONA PREŠEREN

Did you know that Slovenia has a specialised museum of apiculture? Or that in Slovenia bees are kept in hives with uniquely painted front panels? Or that the imperial court in Vienna had a beekeeping instructor from present-day Slovenia, Anton Janša?

Beekeeping occupies a special place in Slovenia's economy as one of its oldest traditional crafts. The Carniolan honeybee (*Apis mellifera carnica*) or the Carniolan grey bee, is an autochthonous species in Slovenia, which means that no other bee species are allowed to be kept. Honey, their product, is more than just a sweetener: it has healing properties and is used as the basis for many beauty and medicinal products.

According to the statistics, Slovenians are a genuine bee-keeping nation, as a relatively significant four out of every thousand of its residents are engaged in this activity.

Beekeeping is a traditional agricultural activity in Slovenia and enjoys a status equal to that of other types of agricultural activity. In the past, when sugar was in short supply, almost every farm kept honeybees in addition to other domestic animals. One bee product is beeswax, which was used to make candles.

From the historical point of view, Slovenia has significantly contributed to the development of apiculture with its rich knowledge. When the Hapsburg empress Maria Theresa founded a beekeeping school in Vienna in the 18th century, Anton Janša (1734–1773) was appointed its first teacher. He had a reputation as an excellent theoretician and expert beekeeper. He was followed by Peter Pavel Glavar and Anton Žnideršič, one of the most prominent beekeepers of the 19th century. Throughout his active years he enhanced the reputation of Slovenian beekeeping as one of the most accomplished beekeepers of his time. The Slovenian Beekeepers' Association was established in 1873 and its newsletter *The Slovenian Beekeeper* has been published since 1898. Ever since, beekeeping has been an increasingly important branch of the economy, with its main products being honey, beeswax, royal jelly, propolis, and other derivatives.

HARDWORKING LADY

Who is this hardworking lady that has supplied Slovenian beekeepers with honey for ages? It is the only honeybee species protected by EU law and widely known among beekeepers as an industrious, modest, and tame honeybee species. It has an excellent sense of direction. It has adapted to our grazing and climatic conditions over thousands of years. It is also a very tame insect, which is the reason for its popularity. Beekeepers affectionately refer to it as a "ladylike honeybee".

And this "lady" is the only species of its kind that enjoys EU protection and is the only one allowed to be kept in Slovenia.

The beehive on the photograph is decorated with beehive panels, an indigenous cultural element of Slovenia. This type of painting flourished between 1820 and 1880. The paintings typically depict Slovenian traditions, legends, saints or mythological creatures.



Photo: Franc Šivic

The Carniolan honeybee

Slovenia has also ensured EU protection for two types of honey with a protected designation of origin: Kočevje Forest Honey and Karst Honey. The latter is renowned for its superior quality due to its dry and mellow texture resulting from the local climatic and microclimatic conditions. It is also rich in enzymes and minerals. Honey types depend on the type of bee pasture. Karst Honey varieties include acacia, (mixed) flower, forest, chestnut, linden tree, wild cherry and Mahaleb cherry honey. Kočevje Honey is typical of the highly wooded area of Kočevje, with its highly diverse flora. The Kočevje varieties mainly include forest, pine, fir and linden tree honey.

THE APICULTURAL MUSEUM

As mentioned above, the town of Radovljica boasts an Apicultural Museum, which is unique in Slovenia. However, recent years have seen a growing number of private collections set up by beekeepers themselves. The Apicultural Museum is part of the larger public institution The Museums of the Municipality of Radovljica and its mission is to preserve the Slovenian beekeeping heritage in the

area of Gorenjsko as well as throughout Slovenia, particularly the famous painted beehive panels and the Carniolan honeybee as an autochthonous species.

The principal task of the Museum is to preserve the legacy of Anton Janša, who was born in Breznica, a village not far from Radovljica. The Museum boasts a large selection of local honeys that Slovenian honeybees produce due to the diversity of pastures and examples of an exceptional element of the Slovenian cultural environment – beehives.

According to the curator, Tita Porenta, the Museum devotes special attention to collecting and displaying a particularity of Slovenian folk art, i.e. painted beehive panels. “We have approximately 600 beehive panels in our collection, which is the largest of its kind in Slovenia. The Museum’s travelling exhibition of Slovenian beehive panels has visited a number of European countries: Austria, Italy, Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, etc.” Porenta stresses that the Museum’s collection also highlights the attitude of the Slovenian people to honeybees, which have a symbolic meaning: bee products are represented in folk crafts such as the making of honey cakes and candles. “The exhibition includes a recording of the sound of the buzzing of bees and the sound of the queen bee piping; moreover, visitors can view a film in Slovenian and English and see a beehive model with live bees.”

To enhance visitors’ experience, the Museum offers a number of accompanying programmes, such as guided tours of the exhibition for adults and school groups, a beeswax products workshop in which participants make candles and wax decorations, and beehive panel painting. There is also a special programme for schools that includes an Apicultural Museum workbook, a *Čebelica Cvetka* (Flora the Bee) colouring book, and an improvised puppet show entitled *Flora the Bee and her Family*.

BEEHIVE PANELS

When speaking about beekeeping and its traditions in Slovenia, one cannot but mention one of the most significant forms of folk art creativity – beehive panels.

These are artistically painted front sides of beehives that are typical of Slovenia and cannot be found elsewhere in the world.

In the 18th and the 19th centuries, wooden beehive panels became an object of folk art that made beehives look like open-air picture galleries. Painted beehive panels are a display of the immensely rich folk imagination and creativity and depict various motifs. Folk artists used paints based on natural pigments and linen oil to en-

sure colour fastness. Subsequently, they used industrially made paints, which cracked. Beehive panel painting reached its heyday between 1820 and 1880 and then started to decline. Some beehives are still decorated with paintings nowadays, however now with contemporary motifs and paints.



Model beehive with live bees for viewing.

Photo: Milan Kambič/Apicultural Museum

SOWING THE SLOVENIAN WAY

Our ancestors were masters of seeds

TANJA GLOGOVČAN, Photo: MOSTPHOTOS

Without a doubt, the autochthonous and domesticated varieties of vegetables and crops represent a treasure that every country must protect and preserve. Slovenians have always had a feeling for plants and the way they taste, and for selecting the right seeds. Seeds are the gifts of our ancestors. Seeds are proof of their love, respect and knowledge.

Our ancestors nurtured a special relationship with seeds. They protected them as something invaluable. It is important that the seeds we sow are of autochthonous origin, tested, have a high germination capacity, are fertile, reliable and adaptable to the growing conditions in Slovenia and provide the foundation for healthy eating, cultivation and agriculture in general.

Autochthonous or home-grown seed types originate from an indigenous variety, are not systematically bred and are cultivated, preserved and propagated in Slovenia. Domesticated or traditional seed types are otherwise of foreign origin, but are well adjusted to Slovenian production conditions and are maintained and produced in Slovenia. Old traditional and autochthonous types of vegetables have, through evolution, adapted to our climate and living conditions and have thus developed a distinctive taste as well as strengthened resistance to pests and diseases.

We Slovenians are grateful for our heritage and traditions, which is why gardening is alive and well. Grandmother's garden is still present in children's memories. This also goes for grandmother's tasty jam and home-grown vegetable and beef soup, which is traditionally served on Sundays.

Slovenians are truly fond of gardening, even if only in a small garden in one's front yard.

A pot of herbs on a windowsill in the kitchen or some basic vegetables planted on one's balcony in a block of flats can almost be considered a decoration in urban housing. In recent years, gardening and healthy eating have become a trend in Slovenia. Fashion and health now go hand in hand.

SLOVENIANS ARE MOST KEEN ON PLANTING LETTUCE

In Slovenia seeds have been systematically collected for 30 years. Since 1988, Semenarna Ljubljana has kept an archived collection of seeds. All samples are tested at the Ptuj Selection Testing Centre. In Slovenia, there are still numerous domestic varieties that have a local name and are passed on from generation to generation. Slovenian autochthonous varieties are presented at an open door day organised every year by Semenarna Ljubljana at the Ptuj Selection Testing Centre. All lovers of gardening are invited to attend this event.

Semenarna Ljubljana can take pride in receiving 40 samples of autochthonous seeds per year. And as they observe, Slovenians' favourite vegetables are still lettuce, cabbage and beans.

Semenarna Ljubljana offers 33 autochthonous and domesticated varieties of vegetables, 6 varieties of field crops, among them onions, garlic, beans, carrots, corn salad (lamb's lettuce), peppers, tomatoes, turnips, lettuce, cabbage, oilseed pumpkin, buckwheat, alfalfa and oilseed rape.

NATIVE SEEDS TO ALSO BE SUPPLIED TO KINDERGARTENS AND SCHOOLS

With a view to promoting Slovenian agriculture, a campaign entitled Let's Plant Autochthonous Slovenian Seeds has been launched in schools by the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food. This activity is part of a wider project entitled The Traditional Slovenian Breakfast.

And how did the children garden? After delivering six bags of native seeds to every kindergarten, the children planted the seeds in their gardens or in pots and troughs on windowsills in classrooms. They observed all the growth stages of planted seeds. In this way, small kids became real biologists and gardeners. When their crops were ready and ripe, they ate them with great pleasure.

BUCKWHEAT

Beneficial to people and excellent for bees

TANJA GLOGOVČAN

Buckwheat is a venerated plant in Slovenia. It has been an important part of rural menu throughout Slovenian history; nowadays, it may be served on a gold-rimmed plate or offered as buckwheat vodka for an aperitif. Buckwheat often figures in Slovenian art as a metaphor of life.

Records of buckwheat in Slovenia date back to 1426, but we can safely assume that it had already been sown decades earlier. In the 16th century it was well-known throughout Slovenia and was the most widely produced grain. This information alone tells us how important buckwheat was in the diet.

THE RUSTIC DIET IS A SOURCE OF GOURMET INSPIRATION

Our ancestors used buckwheat to make bread and prepare dishes like močnik (pudding), žganci (spoon bread), kolač and pogača (different types of cakes), štruklji (rolled dumplings), krapci (pastry pockets), and kaša (kasha). They consumed it cooked in milk or water and used it in filling for sausages and salami. Krvavice (blood sausages) contained mostly buckwheat, which has now been replaced by rice. Buckwheat pudding and spoon bread were common dishes and it was buckwheat bread that was most often found on the table.

About two hundred years ago it was even cultivated on Ljubljana's Castle and Golovec hill slopes and grown in the vicinity of other Slovenia castles and churches.

Buckwheat is an important gourmet feature of Slovenian folklore. Slovenian inns and restaurants serve buckwheat dishes as culinary specialities.

Modern interpretations of these traditional dishes include buckwheat risotto, buckwheat pudding, buckwheat soup and buckwheat pancakes with jam or walnut filling for desert. It is a source of contemporary culinary inspiration and is used in many different ways, mention has only been made of a few.

One such product – the Slovenian rolled dumplings of Tatary buckwheat with cottage cheese – from the Slovenske dobrote premium product line was awarded the Innovation of 2015 title by the Nutrition Institute. A product must contain at least 30 percent buckwheat flour to be called a buckwheat product. Yet another is the Slovenian buckwheat bread, renowned for its quality.



Buckwheat is nutritional gold and has numerous healing properties.

AJDA THE BEE

This could be the title of the Slovenian version of the German cartoon Maya the Bee. In Slovenia, Maya would be renamed Ajda. Honey-bearing buckwheat varieties are of great importance to Carniolan bee and Slovenian beekeepers. These varieties are especially valuable because they bloom at a time when nectar and pollen are scarce. In August and September, these varieties induce queen bees to hatch; at the same time, they allow bees to prepare their winter supplies and thus increase the likelihood of successful bee colonies overwintering.

Planting buckwheat contributes to the preservation of bees and indirectly to the preservation of the environment as a whole.

We can choose to sew the indigenous seeds of Slovenia.

In the 17th century, Janez Vajkard Valvasor (1641-1693), Slovenian nobleman and polymath, wrote about large quantities of honey exported from Carniola. Its very low price indicates that the production of buckwheat honey was quite substantial at the time.

Buckwheat honey is known for its typical aroma, bitter flavour and large crystals. When liquid, its colour is very dark reddish brown, almost black, and changes to light brown when crystallised. It is known to be the best honey for baking pastry and the nut roll cake potica. It is attributed healing effects by folk tradition and modern scientists alike (www.sciencedaily.com/releases).

BUCKWHEAT’S ROLE IN RITES

Slovenian housewives used to prepare buckwheat dishes on special occasions. In the Prlekija region, buckwheat pastry pockets (buckwheat cake with cottage cheese and sour cream) were eaten ahead of All Saints’ Day. Buckwheat potica and marbled buckwheat bread were eaten at Easter and on New Year’s Eve in some places. In the Štajerska region, the buckwheat rolled dumplings were eaten during the slaughter and curing season, as well as when mowing the meadows. They were made with walnuts for blessing-giving rituals. The buckwheat dishes were part of the daily as well as festive rural menu in the Dolenjska and Bela krajina regions. The buckwheat spoon bread sprinkled with pieces of cracklings or served with sauerkraut or dressed with milk or sour milk is still the regions’ traditional breakfast.

BUCKWHEAT GIVES LIFE

Buckwheat found its way into Slovenian folk fairytales and songs. The story goes that a mythological Kurent (an original carnival character from Ptujsko and Dravsko polje) saved the human race from the deluge. Four people were spared and in return they had to promise to forever love two plants: the grapevine and buckwheat. One of the spared men had sons who settled elsewhere in Carniola; they have since been living on buckwheat, growing wine and remembering the Kurent, their ancient benefactor, with gratitude.

The Buckwheat Grain is another interesting folktale, speaking of the buckwheat as a sacred plant among Slovenian flora. Once upon a time our ancestors began a journey from the East, where there were too many people, towards other parts of Europe. A goddess gave our peaceful forefathers a buckwheat seed, advising them to bury it in the ground wherever they might venture. Were it to grow green in three days, they were to stay in that place, or else dig it out and move on. And the seed failed to bear grain anywhere but in the Slovenian soil.

The most famous folk song about buckwheat sings that across the countries of Koroška and Kranjska buckwheat is grow-

ing ripe and is being reaped by a girl who is so hardworking that her arms hurt and blisters start to form.

The text indicates that reaping buckwheat is a very demanding farming chore. Unlike the fragile girl in the song, tradition has it that women reapers were of sturdy stature and ate and drank a lot. Slovenian poet Josip Murn Aleksandrov wrote a pastoral poem Pesem o ajdi (Song of Buckwheat). He describes the lifecycle of a buckwheat plant through the four seasons using it as a symbol of life and portrays it erotically, sensuously. The poet melts scent, colour and movement, the impression culminates in the symbolism of death. The buckwheat represents life destined to come full circle from an initial rise to a climax and a final fall.

Slovenian popular sayings that go with buckwheat:

Buckwheat produces grains in bora winds.
Buckwheat ripens in a hay rack.
Buckwheat is best sown in St. Margaret’s week (the Feast Day of St. Margaret of Antioch is on 20th July).

COMMON FEMALE NAME

Did you know that Ajda is one of the most common female names in Slovenia? Indeed, it is. It conveys a positive meaning: happy, bright, shining. How can it not – buckwheat fed generations of Slovenians over centuries and is still valued today as rich in nutrition and good for your health.

Indigenous buckwheat varieties: the Darja variety was propagated by crossing selected Slovenian black buckwheat with highly fertile buckwheat variety of Russian origin. The Silva variety was propagated by selecting the grey buckwheat population native to the Dolenjska region; in economic terms, it has proven to be a very successful variety. The Črna gorenjska is an indigenous variety originating in the Gorenjska region. This region is also home to the Čebelica (Bee) variety.



The buckwheat spoon bread sprinkled with pieces of cracklings and served with milk.



THE MAGICAL POWER OF HERBS

For every illness there grows a flower

DANILO Č, Photo: MOSTPHOTOS

But not every flower is for everyone. Whoever wants to use a flower has to learn about it first, as nature also brings forth plants that are detrimental to health, poisonous or downright deadly.

The forests of Slovenia abound with medicinal plants, which are put to use as food, human and animal medication and pest control in plant protection. There are plenty of herbs whose effects have been well-known and appreciated.

THE LINE BETWEEN WITCHCRAFT AND HEALING

This line was blurred until recently. Not being able to explain natural phenomena, people conjured up images of evil spirits, which they would chase with spells and witchcraft. Herbalists initially enjoyed great respect among common villagers. After the onset of Christianity, however, herbalists were often accused of witchcraft. Ignorant people could not distinguish between healing and magic.

Slovenia has a very rich heritage related to witchcraft and magical healing.

The knowledge of herbs and healing was later refined in monasteries and eventually reached common people, too. Over 3000 different species now grow in Slovenia, which is an extremely high number given the size of the country. The outstanding geographical conditions enabled Slovenian folk medicine to use as many as 500 medicinal plants of domestic origin.

THE LEGEND OF THE FRIGHTFUL HERBALIST

The stories of Josip Vandot, born in the heart of Slovenian mountains in Kranjska Gora, depicted the legends set in the Alpine landscape. All Slovenians know the stories of Kekec and his adventures. In one of them, Kekec decides to help his blind friend Mojca. He finds the cure for blindness at the house of the frightful Pehta, who was a good herbalist and who knew of a rare flower that could restore Mojca's eyesight. This is what happens in the end, as the brave shepherd tricks the wicked herbalist after she kidnaps Mojca. It is also thanks to Kekec that Pehta disappears from the area.

NATURE-BASED HEALTH TODAY

When it comes to medicinal plants, the most important thing is know-how.

If the ‘magic’ is to work, one must have a pure heart. One must not be driven by the desire for money or revenge.

In the past, plants were subjected to singing or chanting before use. People believed that this boosted their medicinal effects. Plants have been used for brews, baths, ointments, oils and incenses, herbal butters, drops and tinctures. Women were always intrigued by “elixirs of youth”. Nowadays plants are used mostly for teas.



The magical powers of dandelion can be tested by blowing hard at a dandelion clock. The number of remaining seeds tell us how many children we will have, how many people of the opposite sex we will attract, and similar. In the photo: Yellow dandelions in the summer.

DANDELION FOR SPRING CLEANSING, BLUE HEALTH FROM THE FOREST, LIME FOR LOVE AND FLOWERS FOR HIGH SPIRITS

Medicinal herbs that Slovenians are particularly fond of picking include dandelion leaves. These are most typically consumed in the form of salads with potatoes, boiled eggs or fried bacon, pumpkin seeds, beans or chickpeas. This healthy salad is a boost to the immune system: it helps cleanse the blood and boost metabolism, lowers blood sugar levels, helps with gallbladder problems and blockages, alleviates rheumatic complaints and probably prevents many other illnesses, too. Dandelion is also used to make soups, sauces and vegetable juices, tea for weight loss, wine or honey. In the old days people believed in the magical powers of dandelion and used it for fortune telling and divination.

Soon after dandelions appear, nature offers us blueberries. If picked before blossoming, they can be used in brews that reduce blood sugar levels and are very effective at cleansing the body. Blueberries also make nicotine rather repugnant to smokers. Blueberry juice has anti-inflammatory effects and eliminates bad breath and metabolic disorders. Dried fruits are an excellent cure for diarrhoea. Blueberries have a range of other medicinal effects. Although the sweet fruits taste best au naturel, they are also delicious in pies and rolls. Blueberry is a very magical plant: if we place it under the threshold, it will chase away all unwanted guests.

The honey scent of lime-tree, the symbol of Slovenia, delights us from late May and into June. Lime blossoms are used against cramps and to prevent sweating. However, overconsumption of lime blossom brews is hazardous for cardiac patients. Lime blossoms are also used for treating kidney diseases and removing mucus from the lungs and trachea. They also cleanse blood and heal intestinal wounds. Lime blossom tea is a very tasty drink with a mildly tranquilising effect. Lime blossoms were widely used in love charms because of their sweet smell.

“As sound as a cornel” (meaning “As sound as a bell”) is a well-known saying in Slovenia. Cornel grows at forest edges throughout Slovenia and its fruits contain plenty of vitamin C. They are used to reduce fever and blood pressure. They can be made into marmalade, soup, sauce or juice. Ripe fruits can be eaten fresh, but they may taste rather sour. Cornel is globally known as goji berries that originate in China. Prior to drying, goji berries are soaked in sweet syrup, which improves their taste and makes them more popular.

Spirit distilling is an ancient Slovenian tradition; spirits thus produced were also used as the basis of herbal liqueurs. Both blossoms and fruits can be steeped in home-distilled brandies. Arnica soaked in brandy was used to treat bruises and contusions. Well-known products include wormwood and juniper brandies used to alleviate stomach complaints.

EFFECTIVE AWAKENING FROM WINTER SLEEP

The most beneficial plants in spring are those that cleanse and boost our vitality after the short winter days and lack of sun.

We can then enter the summer relieved of the weight gained over the winter, of the darkness and our heavy thoughts.



The shadow of a lime tree was once the place of gathering, consulting and judging (only the truth could be spoken under a lime tree) as well as merrymaking; the tree was a patron of newlyweds and families and a guardian against lightning.

HERBAL HOUSE

Nature is in the air

DANILA GOLOB

Situated in the heart of the Soča river valley in the village of Plave, Herbal House is a family home with two unique herbal rooms. It is open to travellers, tourists and anyone seeking to experience a different side of Slovenia. The Velišček family will welcome you and offer a glimpse of their everyday life, filled with fresh air, green meadows and the scent of flowers.

Members of the Velišček family, a hospitable and inquisitive family, who claim to speak "Slovenglish", some kind of blend of Slovene and English, are true lovers of nature, gardening and mountain hiking. They love to try new recipes and dishes and are pleased to invite guests to their table.

The idea for Herbal House came from Vesna Velišček, a herbalist and traveller who runs the company Slocally, inviting tourists to experience a different side to Slovenia, something that can only be done in the company of locals.

The rest of the friendly, likable team are her life partner Robert, an excellent photographer, her father Ivan, an enthusiastic woodworker who loves to pick forest fruit and mushrooms, and her mother Karmen, a lover of flowers and herbs and a keen gardener, who is in charge of the home-made cuisine.



Vesna Velišček

Photo: Herbal House archives

RELAX IN A HERBAL ROOM

When Vesna lived with her parents in Plave, she loved to host travellers from all over the world, inviting them to stay at their house through the website Couchsurfing. "And so the world came to our tiny village of Plave. I explored the Soča Valley and its surroundings with my travelling guests, while my parents, who had never even travelled by plane, learned about new cultures." Vesna, who loves to backpack, has always wanted to run a hostel. When she and her brother moved away, the upper floor of the house remained vacant. So the idea was born to have herbal rooms and rent them out to guests.

They started arranging two herbal rooms, one single and one double room, in December 2013.

They have designed useful and multifunctional furniture and made custom pillows and filled them with herbs to help tired travellers calm their minds and fall into a deep sleep.

The bed, which is filled with fern, has a soothing effect on the body too. "Mum also found brightly coloured towels and hand embroidered bedding with Idrija lace, which had been part of her dowry," Vesna confides to us. They put glasses with a potpourri of dried aromatic herbs in the rooms, and herbal soap in the bathrooms. "We have been gathering herbs since we were young, and we also give them to friends and acquaintances as a present, so this is why herbs or medicinal plants are an essential part of the story behind the herbal rooms. The garden, where vegetables grow all year round, is also available to our guests for use," she says. Vesna's mum, whom Vesna describes as a little bit obsessed with crocheting, has even made crochet lavender sachet key rings. The innovative family have also provided a selection of books for their guests to read – books by foreign or Slovenian authors who have written about their experience of Slovenia or have placed their story in the Slovenian environment.

Vesna, who now lives in Ljubljana, comes to her parents' house every week to remain in close contact with the countryside and, of course, to welcome their guests. "The countryside relaxes me and calms me down. I love coming back here to see my parents, who pass on their precious knowledge of gardening, herbs and interpersonal relations to me," she says.

OUR HOME IS YOUR HOME

In Herbal House, they swear by slow tourism, a type of tourism that enables the host and guest to take time to travel, discover the local countryside, meet local people and try local food.

In a way, the host becomes the guest's friend, shows the guest around the local area, takes him around to meet locals, serves him local food etc. "This is why our house is a homestay (staying in the home of a local family) in the true sense of the word," says Vesna. When guests enter the front door of the house, they enter their home. They can accommodate up to 4 guests at a time, as they swear by boutique tourism.

Guests can join the Velišček family for breakfast and dinner, try some home-made delicacies or chat with them over a cup of herbal tea. They are welcome to help gather medicinal herbs and learn about them. They can learn how to make herbal soap, herbal ointment, a lavender sachet, a herbal pillow, a herbal omelette (fritalja) or herbal potica cake (gobanca). They can also enjoy other activities that the Soča valley and its surroundings have to offer. In Herbal House, guests can get a wealth of information on various activities taking place in the immediate vicinity or surrounding area.

From April 2014 to March 2015, they had 45 overnight stays, most of them by foreign tourists. "Guests leave our house happy because we involve them in our day-to-day chores," says Vesna. The family are also thinking of providing a 30-minute relaxation on herb-filled pillows for all interested travellers when the herbal rooms are not taken by guests. "This would help them slow down their pace of travel for a moment and would be a new experience for them – coming into the home of a local family and enjoying the slow beat of the countryside," Vesna explains. The hospitable Velišček family open their doors to anyone whose travels take them to these parts.

HERBAL HOUSE IS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL SLOVENIAN PROJECT ON TRAVELSTARTER

Herbal House is one of the eight pilot projects on TravelStarter, a worldwide crowdfunding platform for tourism and travel, which is the result of Slovenian creativity, knowledge and technology. Out of the three Slovenian projects selected via TravelStarter, Herbal House is the most successful project in terms of funds raised (1.403\$). They will use these funds to upgrade Herbal House and build an open-air "Green Room" near the house. The 'room under the stars' will be a natural open-air wellness and selfness zone with wooden deck chairs, hammocks, herbal baths and pillows.



Photo: Mosiphotos

THE KARST BIODIVERSITY

As Below, So Above

MARCO ANTONIO BATALHA, NATAŠA PIPENBAHER, SONJA ŠKORNIK, MITJA KALIGARIČ
Photo: MITJA KALIGARIČ

When you visit one of the marvellous caves in the Karst, also hike on one of the trails that cross it and admire the beauty that exists above the ground. As the Karst is beautiful below, so it is above.

It is the semi-dry calcareous grasslands, which are among the richest vegetation types in the world, home to thousands of plant and animal species, and part of the Slovenian cultural landscapes since Roman Times.

The Karst is located in southwestern Slovenia, close to Italy, above the bay of Trieste in the northernmost part of the Adriatic Sea. This region is traditionally known as a non-forested stony grassland area, but 2,500 years ago it was almost completely covered by oak forests. What happened in the meantime? At that time, the Romans began colonising the region, clearing the forest and establishing open areas that could be used as agricultural fields or pastorals.

The “grassland period” of the Karst region started, as population grew and more forested areas were cleared. Human derived clearances in the Karst landscape were associated with soil erosion, which created a drier and warmer microclimate.

People moved with their livestock seasonally over a broad territory from the western Balkans to the Adriatic and the Alps, and this “transhumance” became one of the important factors contributing to vegetation and landscape, introducing new species and shaping the distribution of the grassland flora. The process went on and peaked in the late eighteenth century, when about three fourths of the region were covered by grasslands.

THINGS YOU CAN’T FIND ANYWHERE ELSE IN THE WORLD

If you go to one of those grasslands today and begin counting the number of plant species within a square with a side length of 50 cm, you could find around 70 species, an impressive number. This high small-scale diversity places the Karst grasslands among the richest vegetation types in the world. Species such as the Cypress Spurge, the Squarrose Knapweed, the White Asphodel, and the Yellow Cornflower are some of the most attractive plants that occur in these grasslands. Not only is the flora diverse, but also the fauna. Among this diverse fauna, we find rare and threatened species, including insects (such as the Eastern Eggar Moth), birds (the Sombre Tit, for example), and mammals (like the Snow Vole).

Postojna, Pivka, Predjama, Škocjan, and Vilenica, just to name a few, are among the thousands of caves that made the Kras limestone plateau in Slovenia famous worldwide. “Kras” became “Karst” in English, and a whole branch of science, karstology, was named after it. But, in that region, above breathtaking stalactites, magnificent stalagmites, underground lakes, spectacular dolines, and human fish, there is another type of natural beauty, frequently overlooked.

Squarrose Knapweed (*Centaurea triumfettii*).



Spotted Fritillary butterfly (*Melitaea didyma*).

Some species are even endemic, that is, they do not occur anywhere else in the world, only in the Karst. These grasslands have been used mainly as hay meadows and pastures.

The hay produced there has been used to feed the animals and the manure has been used on arable land to improve crop production. As such, the semi-dry grasslands are also part of the tradition and of the cultural landscape of the Slovenian Karst.

IDEAL RELATION BETWEEN GRASSLANDS AND FORESTS

However, the situation has been changing. In the late eighteenth century, first acorn and later black pine were planted to decrease soil erosion. These plantations improved soil and microclimate conditions in a way that the growth of other woody species became possible. If grasslands occupied 75% of the Karst in the late eighteenth century and forests only 17%, today the situation is reversed: 73% of the region is covered by forests and only 20%, by grasslands.

The abandonment of land and subsequent reforestation is beneficial for the microclimate, a gain in terms of a lowered input of pesticides and fertilisers, and positive for biodiversity conservation.

For instance, many vertebrates – birds, bats, wolves, wildcats, and bears – are associated with mature forest and can have their populations increased. However, it is important to keep the area covered by grasslands above a certain threshold, so as not to lose species associated with open habitats.

As a consequence of this replacement, grasslands are considered as an endangered and strongly declining habitat type in the Karst and deserve special consideration from nature conservancy. Since heterogeneity begets biodiversity, a landscape with grasslands and forests, such as the one we have now, is better for conservation purposes and to keep the remnants of the traditional Karst landscape identity, the one that has been forged since the times when the Romans were walking on Slovenian land.



Cypress Spurge (*Euphorbia cyparissias*).

HIKING

Favourite sport of Slovenians

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ



Every true hiker will tell you that real life only begins when the boots are laced up, the backpack is on, the house door is locked and only mountains lie ahead. And mountains are everywhere – in Slovenia, hiking is truly a mass recreation.

It's not about the destination, it's about the trail, the hiker would add, and off he goes. There may be snow, or colourful autumn leaves, or freshly cut grass under foot, and it is always beautiful. Hiking on hills and mountains is always a wonderful experience, where the stunning views are simply overwhelming. It really is no surprise that hiking is so popular in Slovenia, as the pristine and green natural environment is easily accessible from almost anywhere. Even from a city centre you can reach a mountain trail in a few minutes. The choice of trails is immense. You might opt for a short walk along a valley bottom or the slopes of low hills, or opt for difficult via ferrata trails in the high mountains, and enjoy the view of Alpine peaks. The highest of these is Mount Triglav (2864 m), standing out among the other 150 that reach over 2000 m. The trails are never crowded, and you can enjoy the experience in peace.

Across its surface area of just over 20,000 square kilometres, Slovenia has almost 10,000 kilometres of marked hiking trails.

A hiking heaven, where hikers return to rediscover the wonders of the known and be enticed to explore new terrain. You can hike forest nature trails, thematic tourist trails, trails made especially for Nordic Walking, mountain trails of various difficulty, long-distance regional or national connecting paths, alone or in organized events. With adequate equipment and weather permitting, trails are accessible all year long. On many trails there are mountain huts, chalets, shelters and bivouacs where good home cooked food is served and you can stay the night – there are 178 of them across the country; there are also many other places where hikers can stay, identified by a special logo.

RULES IN MOUNTAINS DIFFER FROM THOSE IN THE VALLEY

If you want to hike safely in the mountains, you must know these rules and abide by them. In winter you must be prepared for low



Snow-covered meadows and forests and the crystal-clear air combine to create a wonderful atmosphere – just the thing for all fans of winter and walking.

Photo: Ukrom archives

temperatures, short daylight, closed chalets, less people on the trails, the danger of avalanches and accidents because of slipping. All this must be taken into account, not only on the trail, but in particular when you decide on the specific trail or peak, when preparing for the climb and choosing what to wear and put in your backpack.

The situation in the mountains tends to change rapidly, and may be quite different from what you had expected, so you need to take all the equipment you might or might not need.

Never blindly trust the tracks in the snow, trust your own evaluation and verify whether the hillside you are on is still safe. To hike in the winter you first need the same equipment you would have for hiking in dry summer conditions. In addition, you need good winter hiking boots, plastic boots or boots for ski touring, snow gaiters, quality garments to protect you from wind, cold and humidity, good thermal insulation clothing, sun cream, sufficient additional clothes, and – in case chalets are closed – sufficient hot liquids and food. Technical equipment such as an ice pick and crampons are also essential. And of course you first need to learn how to use them. Ice pick and crampons are a must, even if conditions at the

starting point are perfect, as conditions tend to change with time and altitude. When you have crampons on your boots, you must always use the ice pick.

However, hikers and mountain lovers who are not familiar with winter conditions and lack sufficient experience are advised to join one of the many mountaineering societies and visit the mountains in organised groups led by a mountain guide recognized by Slovenia's Alpine Association.

It is further advisable to learn about winter hiking or to refresh your knowledge in mountaineering schools organized by the mountaineering societies. Hiking tours must always be carefully planned, and you should go from easy to more demanding ones, and the trails and peaks must be chosen in relation to your knowledge, physical fitness and technical qualifications. If you are not in an organized group, you must always keep in mind the following rule: never try a winter ascent to peaks that you have not come to know in dry conditions. In winter the landscape is changed, covered with snow which hides both the trail and the markings.

SUMMER IS THE BEST TIME FOR HIKING

Hiking in summer is so much more exciting, as the blossoming natural world with its wonderful range of colour has a universal appeal, even to those not given to walking in nature or hiking.

You can choose easy short walks in the hills or valley, or more demanding secured paths in mountains offering wonderful panoramas and sights of the sun-drenched Alpine peaks.

You can also go to the sunny Primorska region, to the inviting Karst (but watch for the bora wind), and stretch your legs on narrow paths among stone walls, dried grass, pines and smoke tree bushes. We hope this might entice you to get out into nature in any season. And we also hope that you will enjoy it and repeat it as many times as possible... Happy trails!



Will you choose easy short walk or more challenging one?

Photo: Aljoša Rehar/STA

THE HEALING POWER OF SPRING WATER

Slovenia: a land of natural spring waters

ALENKA IVANČIČ

Drinking spring water is becoming increasingly popular, and you will find it all over Slovenia. The old knowledge about water is being reinvented and updated with the latest scientific findings. Spring waters, especially those with healing properties, rich in minerals, beneficial microorganisms and good energy, help us to overcome health problems and stress.

With its 7,500 freshwater springs, 26,000-km network of rivers and streams, 200 artificial and natural lakes, and 7,700 occasionally active torrential streams, Slovenia ranks among the most water-abundant European countries. Every year, 34 billion cubic metres of water, or about 0.4% of the world freshwater reserves, flow through its waterways, which is four times the European average.

THE COUNT'S WATER – AN ELIXIR OF HEALTH AND REJUVENATION

Slovenia is not only among the countries most abundant in water, with a rich supply of drinking water amounting to 10,000 m³ per capita per year, but is also rich in water with healing properties, such as the so-called Count's Water, which originates in the ravine of the Sopotnica steam above the village of Gabrje near Tolmin. According to radiesthesists' measurements, this water, with its two million Bovis units of bio energy, is supposedly the most energetically powerful, or at least among those with the highest ever measured energy values, in the world.

In terms of its healing properties, it is superior even to the miraculous water of Lourdes in France or Fatima in Portugal.

Ancient legend has it that the Count's Water may prevent the gravest of diseases and be a true elixir of health and youthfulness. Supposedly, it was drunk, among others, by Count Coronini of Tolmin, who lived in the castle on the hill above Tolmin called Kozlov Rob, to which it was carried in round wooden containers known as lampe. The Count was driven out by Tolmin rebels, but knowledge of the healing spring where sacred pagan rituals were carried out has been preserved to the present day. Marked hiking trails lead to this source of clean, fresh and mineral-rich water that never dries up.

AS REGARDS DRINKING SPRING WATER, SLOVENIA HAS A LONGSTANDING TRADITION

Worshippers of healing springs believe that by drinking good healing spring water our bodies are provided with positive energy, which strengthens the internal organs and the immune system. This is one reason why the frequenting of healing springs among Slovenians has a long tradition. It originates back in the times of pagan beliefs, when on New Year's Eve cake, bread and apples were thrown to

the waters and wells and springs were worshipped and adorned. "Blessed" springs with soothing and healing properties were often protected with a fence, and a small chapel was often built at the site as a sign of gratitude, showing Slovenians' respectful attitude to water, especially to waters to which healing properties have been attributed.

Some springs were gradually restored and equipped with filling facilities, for example those in Radenci or Rogaška Slatina, while elsewhere they were turned into baths and spas with hotel complexes, especially in the north-eastern part of Slovenia.

THE MIRACULOUS SPRING OF BABA – A RELIABLE HARBINGER OF RAIN

Some healing springs have to the present day maintained their primeval character and remained almost untouched and hidden in their natural environment. Such is the Baba spring in the Dolenjska region, where water literally gushes out every time before it starts raining. Just beforehand, the whole hill shakes vigorously. The infallible forecast lasts five minutes, and then the miraculous spring calms down completely.

FISH HELP TO CURE SKIN CONDITIONS

As in the past, still today water from most natural springs is suitable for drinking, bottling, bathing in or even, where conditions allow, for swimming. This last is particularly valued by all those who are not so keen on chlorinated water! Sometimes it is sufficient that only the affected part of the body is soaked in the healing water. One such place is Stare toplice (literally "old spa") in the Dolenjska region, a natural thermal spring with fish that help to cure skin conditions.

Sometimes it is enough to just take a short rest near the spring to fill ourselves with good energy and invite health and joy into our lives.

Many springs overlap or are connected with natural sites of healing energy, which people have always frequented because of their soothing energy; true pilgrimage trails that lead to these places bring in innumerable visitors.

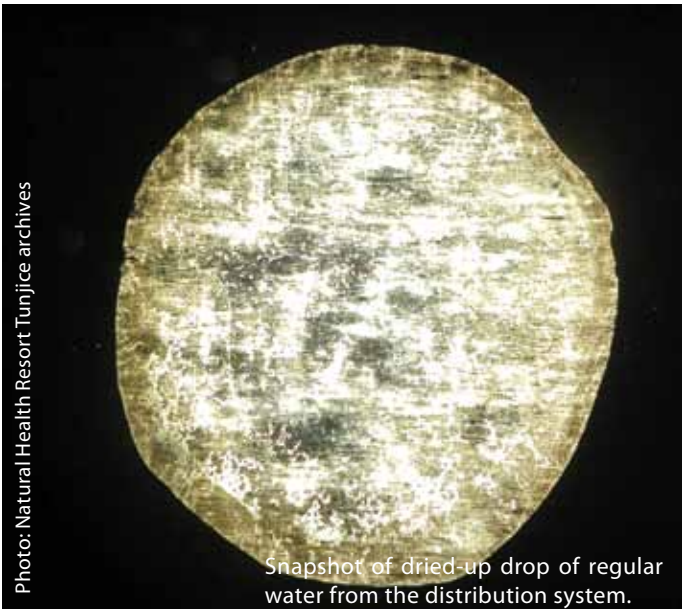


Photo: Natural Health Resort Tunjice archives

Snapshot of dried-up drop of regular water from the distribution system.



Photo: Natural Health Resort Tunjice archives

Snapshot of dried-up drop of the Living Water from Tunjice, which, as opposed to the regular water that takes up spiral form when dried or frozen, indicates the continuous rotation as evident from the photograph.

SLOVENIAN “MEN’S WATER” GIVES SEXUAL POWER

It may also happen that a totally unknown spring becomes incredibly popular overnight and begins to attract teeming masses of people, as was the case of Kisli studenec in Rečica in the 1970s. The euphoria was triggered by a newspaper article on the miraculous orange-coloured “Slovenian men’s water”, purported to give men unusual sexual power as well as help treat kidney disease. To this day, most of the visitors are male, visiting the spring at nightfall...

LIVING WATER FROM TUNJICE

Natural Health Resort Tunjice near Kamnik, with its spring of “Living Water” with powerful healing properties, is also very well attended at all times. It ranks among the five waters in the world which have the same composition as the water in living organisms. It helps a person where the help is most necessary. Due to its high content of resistant elements, it increases the level of energy in the body, neutralises free radicals, cleanses the body of toxins, strengthens the immune system, relieves several physical and psychological problems, and promotes the self-healing potential of the human organism.

On the other hand, the springs in Nuskova in the Goričko Landscape Park, which in folk tradition help against anaemia, have never attracted hosts of visitors although, according to the Faculty of Chemistry and Chemical Technology of the University of Ljubljana, this is actually the best mineral water in Slovenia.

SCIENTIFICALLY PROVEN HEALING PROPERTIES

The power of water lies not only in its purity. Good water often has a unique smell, taste and colour, which our ancestors understood to signify special healing properties. They knew which water was beneficial and which was not. Gradually this knowledge has been largely forgotten, owing to today’s reliable water supply and to our modern lifestyle. However, with ever growing awareness, increasing “green-oriented” attitudes, concern for sustainable development and interest in a return to nature, this knowledge has undergone a revival. Thus the number of devotees and visitors of healing springs is rapidly increasing. Also there are more and more people, like Jože Munih, a well-known radiesthesis, one of the top connoisseurs of Slovenian water and the author of the books *Zdravilni vodni izviri* and *Geometrija v trikotniku* (The healing water springs and The geometry of the triangle), who claim that chlorinated tap water is valueless in terms of energy, as chlorine kills the micro-organisms that give water added value, and that water from PVC bottles is incomparable with spring water. Science has it that the secret of water lies in its structure, which carries the energy information of the rock and earth layers through which it worked its way to the surface. Water has an immense capacity for memory! According to the BionEvapo® method, each water is believed to have its own water signature.

In short, the energetic and healing potential of Slovenian waters is outstanding. The number of springs with greater or lesser healing potential is countless.

So if you intend to go for a walk in the country to fetch spring water, it is good to keep in mind that it should be collected right at source, where it is cleanest, and at the time when its energies are strongest: at full moon before sunrise.



No matter what the specific health or fitness goal, one cannot achieve the maximum benefit from any health program without drinking the right kind of water in the proper amount. Next to the air we breathe, water is the most important thing we will ever put in our bodies.

Photo: Mostphotos

THE RIVER KOLPA

On the border between Slovenia and Croatia: home of otters, herons and eagles

DANILO GOLOB

Bela Krajina is a region marked by white birch trees and the River Kolpa, which has always united rather than divided the people living on either bank. Slovenia's southern-most river is one of the cleanest and most unspoiled watercourses in the country. It is rich in fish and other animal species, many of them rare and protected.

Grey heron – the symbol and pride of Kolpa Landscape Park.

The Kolpa forms a natural border between Slovenia and Croatia for 118 km, and separates Central Europe from the Balkans. It runs from Osilnica, through Kostel, Kočevje, Črnomelj and Semič to Metlika.

The Kolpa and Kolpa valley are the main attraction and asset of the Kolpa Landscape Park, which covers the area between Stari trg and Dragoši. On its course through the park, the river changes its character several times.

In some parts, the river's channel widens and the flow of water slows down, while in another part, the river runs wildly through the narrow canyon.

RICH FLORA AND FAUNA

The Kolpa provides a favourable habitat for many rare and endangered animal species, in particular for the otter and the European pond turtle. The Kolpa area is also home to many bird species, including the grey heron, which is the most common, and most outstanding are the mighty white-tailed eagle and the goosander. The river is home to over 30 species of fish, some of which cannot be found in any other body of water in Slovenia.

The park's special feature is a typical cultural landscape characterised by steljniki (stands of birch trees with bracken undergrowth) and typical karst features such as karst dolines and terraces.

This area has significant value in terms of nature protection, and a rich biodiversity and landscape diversity.

It has diverse natural features – individual trees of exceptional dimensions or groups of important trees, valleys, karst caves, springs, steljniki, and dolines. The park has a total of 71 natural features, of which 16 are natural monuments. Hrastova Loza, a stand of beeches with nesting sites of the grey heron, is a strict nature reserve – the only one in Slovenia. Marindolski Steljniki, preserved steljniki and overgrown areas near Marindol, is both a natural and cultural monument and as such a great rarity.

Due to the area's remote location and the impassable terrain, the flora has remained relatively untouched and is dominated by natural



The common kingfisher, a small bird of wonderful colours that nests near the water, can be found along the length of the Kolpa.

forests and partly even virgin forests. The cultivated land, particularly grasslands and pastures, has preserved its unique features. The park is home to Illyrian plants (plants that grow in the area of the former Roman province of Illyricum), sub-Mediterranean plants, Alpine plants and wetland plants. Various species of orchids grow in the meadows. The Kolpa is one of the Natura 2000 sites of international importance.

NATURE PROTECTION

The Kolpa Landscape Park is divided into three conservation areas. Protection is strictest in the first conservation area, which encompasses alluvial plains (a slightly sloped area or undulating land created by the deposition of sediment during periodic floods) along the river Kolpa, the river itself, steep and gently sloping riparian areas and areas with important natural features. The second conservation area encompasses mostly agricultural and forest areas, where the natural balance has been preserved due to the traditional use of land, and a cultural landscape typical of these parts has been formed. It also includes recreation areas. The third conservation area includes villages with traditional orchards, larger settlements and certain wine-growing areas.

The main purpose of establishing the protected area of the Kolpa Landscape Park was to preserve natural features, biodiversity and landscape diversity and implement measures to ensure the conser-

vation of Natura 2000 sites and areas of ecological importance. The park also has the purpose of integrating economic and social development in the park area and cross-border cooperation.

“The expert basis for taking protection measures is monitoring and supervision in the protected area,” says Boris Grabrijan, the Director of the Kolpa Landscape Park. They also educate and encourage the wider public to be environment-friendly when in the park. “The protection measures also include school pupils’ involvement in making bird hatcheries and monitoring bird populations, clean-up campaigns, taking care of habitats and the protection of species, the promotion of environment-friendly tourism, farming and other economic activities,” stresses Mr Grabrijan.

RICH CULTURAL HERITAGE

The park conserves and is home to a rich cultural heritage. Some of the interesting things to see are the distinctive enclosed rectangular homesteads known locally as “dvori”, which consist of a residential part, barn, stable and inner yard; plus there are castles and many mills and sawmills along the Kolpa.

One of the park’s important projects is the Kolpa eco-etno project (ecological and ethnological activities along the Kolpa). Its aim is to preserve the rich ethnological heritage of the local environment, and is based on ecological principles.

The Šokec farm (Šokčev dvor), a protected cultural monument, has been renovated and Kolpjanke Villas, small wooden glamping houses on sleds, have been built by Kolpas d.o.o. as part of the project. The mobile houses are a small model of a traditional Bela Krajina house and granary. They are made of natural, traditional materials: spruce wood, wool from the Slovenian native sheep breed ‘belokranjska plamenka’, Adlešiči flax and hemp.

VISIT THE ENTICING KOLPA AND ITS SURROUNDINGS

In the Kolpa Landscape Park, you are welcome to visit the Šokec farm, an open-air museum that features a typical Bela Krajina farmhouse, where guests are greeted by the locals in traditional Bela Krajina clothes and served Belokranjska pogača (salted cake) and a glass of home-made drink. The local people are already familiar with the hospitality of Bela Krajina and the beauties of the Kolpa, whose magnificent scenery attracts an increasing number of foreign tourists.

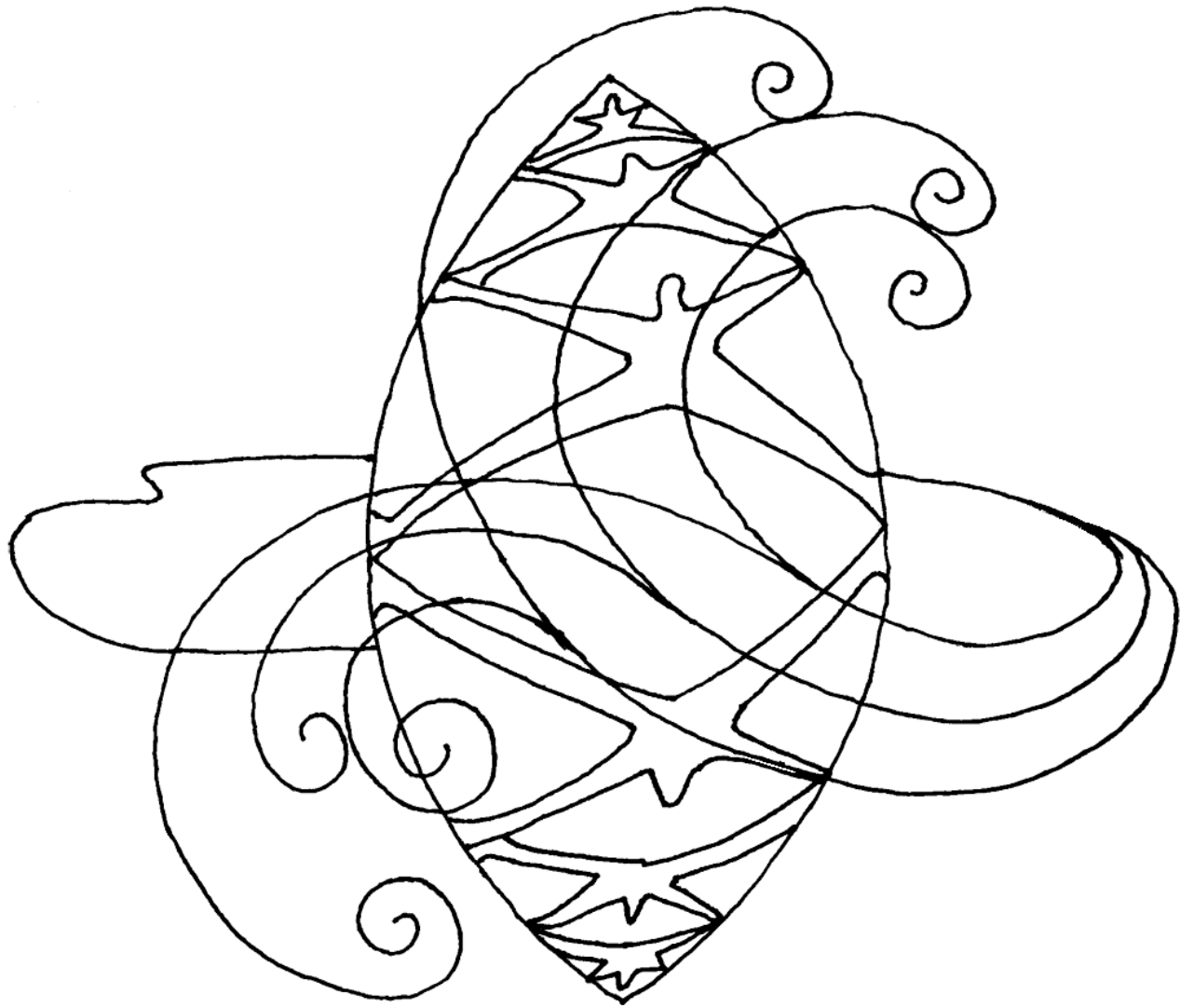


The Kolpa used to have over 80 active mills, 16 of which have survived in the park area on the Slovenian side (and twice as many on the Croatian side). Three of the Slovenian mills still run occasionally. The Kolpa River boasts a rich fish fauna and is one of the warmest and cleanest rivers in Slovenia.

FARONIKA THE FISH

Guarding the purity of the Soča river

ALENKA IVANČIČ, Illustration: MARKO POGAČNIK



Faronika the Fish is a mythological creature who has acquired a new role. Once she carried the earth on her back, and now she is the enchanted protectress of the pure green waters of Slovenia’s Soča River, one of the most beautiful waterways in Europe. Like a siren swimming peacefully in the Soča’s pools, she symbolises the campaign to keep the waters clean.

Faronika the Fish is the subject of a Slovenian folk song about a mighty half-fish half-woman, swimming in the cosmic ocean and carrying on her back the earth, which would otherwise sink into the depths. The North Star is her eye.

The movement of her fins causes earthquakes, each flap of her tail generates floods, and should it turn to her back the earth would be doomed.

This is probably why our ancestors, looking for explanations for earthquakes in legends and myths, believed that they were caused by Faronika.

EXPLORING THE FOLKLORE

The folk song about the fish Faronika was first recorded in the village of Podmelec in the Tolmin region. Since then, it has inspired not only folk singers, but numerous Slovenian artists who continue to write prose and poetry about it, and portray it in various techniques. Its best-known representation was found in this part of Slovenia: a fresco depicting Faronika, the mythical protectress and mistress of the earth, has recently been discovered in the church of Saint Lambert in Baška grapa.

FARONIKA FROM THE SOČA, GUARDIAN OF CLEAN WATERS AND GREEN CONSCIENCE OF MANKIND

In today’s world dominated by reason and profit, where there is no room for legends and tales, Faronika is not forgotten. Numerous societies, movements, non-governmental organisations, people living along the banks of the Soča, and in particular the Tolmin Fishing Club, Kobarid Municipality and the LUTRA Insitute for the Preservation of Natural Heritage are working to revive this mythical creature, providing it with new meaning and substance in line with the current sensibilities. Their aim is to preserve clean waters, in particular the Soča River with its Soča trout, which is a big and strong fish, not unlike the mythical one. The true Soča trout lives only in the Soča and its tributaries.

This is one of the reasons why in Kobarid, in the park by the source, a statute of Faronika made of metal waste found in Slovenia’s rivers was erected to serve as a reminder and warning. The statute was sculpted by Rok Mohar from the Metelkova Autonomous Cultural Centre, who made the statue under the project LIFE + AQUAVIVA - Living Water from Biodiversity to the Tap, to remind the visitors to respect the river and not jeopardize the life in it.

WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM ANCIENT FOLKLORE

The modern interpretation of the old folk legend with the mythical figure of the Soča Faronika teaches and reminds us that “in nature everything is linked: water with the river, the river with fish, fish with mayflies, insects with willows, trees with earth.

Soča with the trout in its pools. And mankind with all of this.”There is a frail and delicate balance which we must respect and preserve; we must protect waters from excessive exploitation, reckless encroachments, wild dumping and pollution, so that the protectress of clean waters and guardian of the earth, the mighty fish Faronika, may continue to swim peacefully in them.

FARONIKA THE FISH

A fish swims in the sea.
A fish named Faronika.

Jesus swims after it
From the great sea depths:

‘Wait for us,
Faronika the Fish!

We want to ask you
What is happening around the world.’

‘If I wag my tail
The whole world will be sunk.

If I turn onto my back,
The whole world will be doomed.’

‘Oh do not do this,
Faronika the Fish.

For the sake of the innocents,
and women in labour.’

JERNEJ BARBIČ

Slovenian professor in the US who helped create The Hobbit

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, Photo: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

In 2011, the respected American scientific magazine MIT Technology Review listed him as one of the world's 35 most outstanding innovators under 35, one of the others being Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg. In the same year, this 3D animation specialist received a half-million dollar grant from the American National Science Foundation for promising young researchers.



More recently, he received a Sloan Research Fellowship (awarded to the best researchers and lecturers in computer science in the US); to date, 42 Sloan Fellows have gone on to win a Nobel Prize.

So what has 38-year-old Jernej Barbič, who comes from a village near Most na Soči in Slovenia, done to acquire all this attention? First a student at the Faculty of Mathematics and Physics in Ljubljana, then a doctoral student at the Carnegie Mellon University and a post-doctoral researcher at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Jernej Barbič has made a breakthrough in 3D-animation.

His method has been used in many well-known films. It has been used by Disney and Pixar, and Berbič himself has been involved in the making of one part of the Hobbit trilogy.

This has been to his great satisfaction, as writing and film are two things he wanted to dedicate his life to at first.

HIS ACHIEVEMENTS WON OVER MAJOR ANIMATION STUDIOS

What do fantasy characters from the Hobbit film trilogy, mathematical tree models and aircraft engines have in common? Jernej Barbič has joined these fields in computer graphics, and his achievements have won over several large animation studios (including Pixar and Disney) which now use his inventions.

It all began with a Newtonian flash of inspiration. When he was a young boy, he loved to watch the trees on his way to school,

mesmerised by their movement in the wind – the swaying of the treetops and the fluttering of the leaves. After high school, when he enrolled in a degree course in mathematics, he began to recognise complex mathematical patterns in their movement, and he thought that he might at some point make a precise mathematical model of a tree. But he knew that to do something that complex he would need more mathematical and computer knowledge.

The wish to mathematically model nature considerably influenced his subsequent decisions about his studies and occupation. After graduating, he enrolled in postgraduate computer science studies in the USA, where he focused his mathematical knowledge on computer graphics, mechanics and numerical methods. Today he is a lecturer in computer science at the University of Southern California and a renowned expert in three-dimensional modelling and “fast physics”.

THE DIFFERENCE IS IN APPROACH

When comparing students in the USA and Slovenia, Barbič says that Slovenian students, like their American counterparts, are diligent and hard-working. “The difference is in approach. Slovenian students are rather modest: they don’t want to draw attention to themselves, so they don’t ask many questions. And almost none of them attend office hours. In the USA, on the other hand, students are much more proactive. They send emails to their professors, even on a Saturday night, and expect replies immediately. And if they don’t get them, they’ll complain and make it clear that they don’t rate your teaching! This is common practice in the USA. The same is also true for foreign students in the country, who are not few in number, as they know that their grades will count when they apply for a job with an American employer.”

Barbič points out that, objectively speaking, conditions at the top American universities are better than anywhere in Europe, with the possible exception of Switzerland and the UK: “My breakthrough did not happen overnight, but is the result of years of work in the USA, equation after equation, conference after conference. I enrolled in postgraduate studies in the USA with the help of renowned Slovenian lecturers with international experience who now work in Slovenia. In the USA, I did all the work myself or together with my American colleagues and students.”

LIFE IS NOT STATIC, BUT IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING

“I first have to thank my Slovenian mathematics lecturers who had studied at the Carnegie Mellon University and elsewhere in the USA and Canada before me and impressed their American professors. Thus they were able to write letters of recommendation for me which the American universities took seriously. The first two years at the Carnegie Mellon University were very hard, as I had to catch up with the computer science students to be able to keep up with the demanding studies. But I never felt that the teaching staff were treating me any differently on account of my mathematical education. In the USA, my career path was not an unusual one, as students there often change their fields of study. This could not be done so easily in Slovenia. We expect students to choose one study programme and stick to it from undergraduate through postgraduate to doctoral levels and then find employment in their field of study. I don’t find this realistic: how can an eighteen-year-old know what really interests him and what he wants to do for the rest of his life? Life is not static, but is constantly changing. My interests changed during the course of my studies and I would rather not think about what would have happened if I had stuck to theoretical mathematics. In the USA, I’ve learnt that interdisciplinarity is of paramount importance, as it enables students to easily change their field of study and their career path. There is nothing worse than being stuck with a profession that you no longer enjoy just because you cannot change the decision you made in high school.”

Last year, Berbič received a half million dollar grant from the American government for the development of a system for modelling aircraft engines and other components in the aviation industry over the next three years.

Models of this kind are very useful for the industry, as they enable fast and relatively inexpensive testing of complex prototypes in virtual reality. Research on this topic is ongoing. The largest users of computer graphics and animation, however, are still the computer games industry, the film studios and the military, which uses virtual reality to train pilots and members of special forces. In addition to the military, these kinds of simulators are also used in civil aviation, where training involves more than just nicely painted scenery.



BOR KANKARAŠ

Eighteen-year-old Slovenian creates a trailer for a Hollywood film

DANILA MAŠIČ, Photo: PERSONAL ARCHIVES

Wargaming, a developer of massively multiplayer online games, organised a contest to create a trailer for the American film *Fury* last year. Bor Kankaraš, a secondary school student from Slovenia, entered the contest and won it over more than hundred competitors of all age. He taught himself how to do it from the internet.

Fury is a patriotic epic story from the Second World War starring Brad Pitt, Logan Lerman, Jon Bernthal, and Shia LaBeouf. It is about five American soldiers who crew a Sherman tank.

In its computer games, Wargaming promotes the film, which in turn promotes the computer games. This kind of makes it the film's sponsor, but Wargaming also collaborated on its content. Its staff provided expertise on WW II history and the weaponry of the time to the film-makers.

SUCCESS IN HOLLYWOOD

Bor entered the contest by coincidence.

A friend sent him a link to the rules and suggested he edit a trailer for *Fury*, directed by David Ayer; the eighteen-year-old student did so and swept away the competition. Even though the film's official trailer is not the one made by Bor, winning the contest was monumental.

His reward was an invitation to the film's premiere in Washington D.C., where Bor had the opportunity to socialise with the lead actors. He met Wargaming owner Victor Kisly and even US Vice-President Joseph Biden. But it was a meeting with a Vietnam war veteran who told him some haunting war stories that made the most lasting impression on Bor.

After his visit to the American film mecca, Bor said: "When the event was over, I was shocked by the thought that I had stood on the red carpet at the premiere of a Hollywood film. All those famous people, the actors, directors, producers, they were within reach. They freely mingled with the guests at the premiers and were open to conversation. This experience has changed my view on the world."

MOVING IMAGES AND SOUND – AN INSPIRATION FOR DEDICATION AND CREATION

"It all began as a hobby. When I was ten I was already watching all kinds of videos and films, and I started wondering how the scenes and effects were done. I tried to create similar scenes." Bor started learning with basic programmes and gradually replaced them with programmes used by Universal, Paramount, Warner Bros and other studios. "I learned everything by myself, through the web," Bor explained. He has been monitoring the development of the technical tools constantly and has never lacked creativity.

CLEAR CAREER GOAL

His talent is outstanding, yet Bor remains a simple guy. He is not interested in the same things as the majority of his peers. He does not go to clubs. He is repelled by the masses, he does not like crowds. He does not like to be paid attention to. He aspires to stay focused and again excel in the most difficult film productions. When asked about his future plans, he said: "Moving images and sound give us unlimited options. That is what intrigues and motivates me."

At the age of eighteen, he already has enough knowledge and experience to make a movie completely on his own.

He has already made some of his early wishes come true, what remains is the ambition to throw himself into filming. Eventually, he would like to be the one standing behind the camera.

The sky is the limit. Bor is certainly on the path to a bright future in the film world.

The oldest Slovene dramatic text

VESNA ŽARKOVIČ, Photo: THE ŠKOFJA LOKA INSTITUTE FOR CULTURE ARCHIVES

One of the biggest events in Slovenia, the performance of the Škofja Loka Passion Play, based on the oldest dramatic text in the Slovene language, is staged with the participation of more than 900 volunteers. Eight performances are being given over the Lent period, the first on Saturday, 21 March. The Passion Play is expected to attract some 32,000 spectators.

The Škofja Loka Passion Play was created in the manner of older Slovene Passion processions by Capuchin monk Lovrenc Marušič, or Father Romuald, in around 1721. The document is the oldest preserved Slovene dramatic text and is stored in the archives of the Capuchin Monastery in Škofja Loka. It contains biblical scenes centred on Christ's suffering and death of the cross.

At the time of its creation, the Passion was repeatedly staged in the form of a procession through the streets of Škofja Loka. After more than 200 years, it was re-staged again in 1999, 2000 and 2009. The staging of the Škofja Loka Passion Play being a huge organisational and financial challenge, it has been decided that it will henceforth be undertaken only every six years. Thus, after this year's performances, the next will take place only in 2021, when the event will coincide with the 300th anniversary of the Passion's creation and the organisers are even hoping that the Pope will be able to attend.

The Škofja Loka Passion Play, which was declared a live masterpiece of national importance in 2012, also competed to be entered on the UNESCO List of Intangible Heritage this year.

A joint proposal for the nomination was prepared by the Municipality of Škofja Loka and the Ministry of Culture. However, it turned out that a few amendments would be necessary, so the proposal will be re-submitted later in the year. With its entry on the UNESCO List, the Škofja Loka Passion Play would become even better known, though it already attracts a large enough audience.

Essential for every performance of the Passion is the great devotion of the inhabitants of Škofja Loka region to the tradition, as they seek out new talent to play the various roles. Several roles may even be passed down from generation to generation in individual families.

A UNIQUE STORY AND EXPERIENCE

The original story, the location and time of staging, the spirit of volunteerism and the accompanying range of services – all these are things that make the Škofja Loka Passion Play a memorable experience for every visitor.

The story of the Passion starts in Paradise, where Adam and Eve fail to resist temptation and partake of the forbidden fruit.

The scene also provides a good illustration of modern human aspirations, which are reflected in both business and daily life.

The story continues with the arrival of Death and afterwards Hell, where Lucifer punishes sinners. The scenes that follow show the arrival of Jesus Christ all the way to his crucifixion. Inclusion of scenes from both Old and New Testaments makes the Škofja Loka Passion unique among Passion plays. The main message of the Passion is that each individual should think about their origins, their vulnerability and the short span of life one is granted to spend on Earth. A specific feature of the Škofja Loka Passion Play is its being staged in the form of procession, where 800 actors move through the streets and squares of the town.

The majority of other Passion performances take place in the summer, while the Škofja Loka Passion Play is timed for Lent and Easter, thus allowing Christians an even more profound experience of the Passion in this important period.

The staging of the Škofja Loka Passion Play is made possible by more than 1,000 volunteers, of these 800 actors and some 200 involved in the event organisation. Most of them come from Škofja Loka and the neighbouring Poljanska and Selška valleys: "It is very rewarding to see and feel the spirit of passion in working with the volunteers. Rare are the jobs where not only are people willing to participate as volunteers, but they'll also offer you a coffee and something sweet when you visit them at home," says Matej Peternej.

In the weeks during the Passion performance, a varied selection of souvenirs, Passion cuisine and a variety of events related to the Passion tradition will be available in Škofja Loka. Local artists have created different kinds of souvenirs originating in Passion and medieval traditions.

During the event, restaurants in Škofja Loka will serve special Passion dishes that are not otherwise on the menu.

The Passion Office has also prepared a variety of workshops, exhibitions, musical events and various social gatherings to make a visit to the Škofja Loka Passion Play a memorable and unique experience.

Matej Mohorič Peternelj, Project Manager: “This is the oldest dramatised text in the Slovene language, with almost a 300-year tradition. In the last few months before the re-staging of the Passion Play, the anticipation of the upcoming event is fuelled by a series of exhibitions and meetings. Since the autumn, a Passion Office has been operating in the town, and a Passion Camp has been set up, where the actors undertake their preparations. The young people of Škofja Loka show great interest in the project, which is based on volunteerism, as it activates the whole town and indeed the wider area. This not only just another performance; it is much more than that. One aim is to inspire the spectators with the rich costumes and the very performance and at the same time reassure them with the biblical content.”

Škofja Loka processional staging is synthesis of passion play living heritage, which has been developed in the European Alpine region, the local environment, which is built on the originality of vocabulary, with typical portable stages, different assembly cavalry, the order of the figures and the staging of the scene upgrade the medieval town.



Milan Golob – Director: “In the reconstruction of the Passion Play, I wish to point out the artistic and spiritual tradition of the text while respecting its authentic form. I perceive the performance as a challenge and a calling. It touches me spiritually, so as a director I have undertaken it with all due respect. I met with the former director Borut Gartner, who gave me the cross and said, ‘Now bear it!’ Together with the actors, I’ve strived to adapt the level of the language to make it more understandable, so in this I work closely with the language editor. I also wish to bring out the acting expression to make the characters more vivid. I want to show that a Passion can be turned into a cultural experience shared by everyone, so I try to be most sincere in my work. I believe that the Passion Play has reached the phase of maturity. My motto is ‘look at the man and see the man’ – it’s all about the empathetic energy between the actor and the spectator.”



Passion Play is also the biggest performance in the open air in Slovenia. Within the medieval core of Škofja Loka hundreds of performers makes 13 scenes of passion play.

KISSING THROUGH THE AGES

Best kissing moments by photo stories

BRIGITA JUHART

Photo: PHOTOGRAPHS FROM THE COLLECTION OF THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY IN LJUBLJANA



An exhibition in Ljubljana entitled The Adventure of Kisses presents photographs of kisses which tell us about love, happiness, conventions, sports victories, communion with God and much more.

The oldest photograph of a kiss in the collection of the Museum is a mock kiss between officers of the Austrian Hungarian Army. The medals on the uniforms indicate that the photograph must have been taken sometime between 1916 and 1918; it is a very interesting document of a time of extremely rigid etiquette. There are not many photographs from the early twenty century, only one fourth of the whole exhibition, they are very beautiful, lyrical and romantic, showing, for instance, a mother kissing one of her seven children after the end of the war, the homecoming of a Partisan who embraces his mother and brothers, and also goes to the barn to kiss a cow, and a kiss between a father and a daughter. "In the first half of the 20th century kissing between mother and child was not something habitual, so such scenes in photographs are extremely rare" says Irena Uršič, the curator of the exhibition.

A RELAXATION OF THE PROHIBITION ON SHOWING LOVE IN PUBLIC

In the first half of the past century only parents and children were allowed to kiss in public; in the following decades the rules of decorum concerning kissing gradually loosened; there were times of double censure, there was to be no kissing in public, and even less photographing of such kissing.

According to Irena Uršič, the radical shift in this respect is shown by a photograph of a young married couple in Trieste in the 1950s, who indulge in a passionate "just married" kiss, oblivious to their wedding guests and the photographer.

The photo collection of the Museum of Contemporary History contains more than two and half million photographs, kept in several collections that provide different all-embracing views of Slovenia in the 20th century. The Museum specialises in research on serious and difficult topics, such as fascism, the First World War, religious persecution, and similar; so once a year the Museum prepares an exhibition showing a nicer, lighter side of Slovenia's history, and present it at Ljubljana Castle.

EACH PHOTOGRAPH HAS A STORY OF ITS OWN

The people in the photographs come from all walks of society; they are peasants and members of high society, political figures of consequence, religious leaders and artists. However, Ms Uršič decided not to include in the exhibition any photographs of current political leaders, i.e. those governing the country from 1990 onwards.

Each photograph has a story of its own; each captures a particular moment of history. They show us that in the second half of the 20th century kissing became an increasingly popular and universal behavioural pattern, which managed to fully migrate from private life to public life.

THE LOVER'S FESTIVAL

The exhibition at the Ljubljana Castle will continue until the end of May. It was opened on 13 February, on the eve of St Valentine's Day, which in Slovenia became the festival of lovers only in the 1990s. In Slovene folklore, St Valentine's Day is the day when nature begins to awaken. There is a popular saying that St. Valentine "brings the keys of roots".

In the past in Slovenia, the festival of lovers was 12 March, St. George's Day, when "birds mate".

St George's Day is named after Pope Gregory XIII and in the Julian calendar was the first day of spring. Several traditional beliefs are linked to this feast: one says that the first bird that a young maiden sees on such a day will tell her what her husband will be like. Another tenet is that St George brings light and "throws it into water" – according to folk tradition, by St George's day the length of daytime is already such that workers, who until such time of year work in the light of candles and petrol lamps, can finish their work in daylight.

In Slovenia, St George's Day continues to be celebrated: carrying burning candles, small boats made of wood, paper or other natural materials are launched on watercourses. This tradition of launching "small Georges" on rivers and creeks is particularly powerful in Gorenjska, in towns with centuries of craftwork tradition: Tržič (shoemaking), Kropa (smithing, nail making) and Železniki (iron smelting).

MODERN INTERPRETATION OF CLASSICAL LACE

Tina Koder Grajzar and Manca Ahlin, master lace-makers

TANJA GLOGOVČAN

There are two main Slovenian bobbin lace styles, one from Idrija and the other from Žiri. Idrija Lace, which is made only in the Idrija region, is listed in Slovenia's register of cultural heritage, while lace-makers from Žiri registered their handicrafts under the brand name Slovenian Lace. Both brands offer various modern interpretations of the traditional ways.

Tina Koder Grajzar and Manca Ahlin are modern artists who have been making lace since their early childhood. They come respectively from the two birthplaces of lacemaking in Slovenia, Idrija and Žiri.

SIGNATURE JEWELLERY AND ACCESSORIES

Tina Koder Grajzar has devoted her life to making lace. Lace is art, a beautiful adornment. "Lace is like a gentle whisper - you can hear it but to really understand it, you have to come closer."

Her signature lace evolves from traditional Idrija bobbin lace-making, in which she excels.

Her knowledge of textile and clothes design also helps: "It helps me make three-dimensional lace from two-dimensional lace." Her red scarf with lace enchanted Hillary Clinton, who had accompanied her husband, American President Bill Clinton, on a state visit to Slovenia.

But Tina's speciality is designing lace jewellery, which she does in cooperation with Biljana Klekačkoska, a designer from Macedonia.

Their jewellery combines Idrija lace and filigree. "We combine lace and silver thread," says Tina. Her lace is already shown on catwalks and beauty pageants.

And the work of the young artist has already been widely recognized and has won numerous awards, both at home and abroad. She won the first prize for her knitted scarf with Idrija lace applications, made of sheep's wool, under the European project Lanatura which had designers from Slovenia competing with those from Italy. Her Idrija lace necklace is displayed in the Silk Museum in Italy. She says, however, that she "cherishes most the Zlata Vitica, the award conferred on her by Slovenia's Chamber of Crafts".

The difference between kitsch and quality design is in the combining of one's vision with knowledge. Tina gets the inspiration for her



Photo: Tina Koder Grajzar archives

Tina Koder Grajzar

Tina Koder Grajzar began her career in the family business Koder d.o.o., engaged in producing and sales of design products with Idrija Lace applications. Currently she has her own shop in the old centre of Ljubljana.

In the future, Tina Koder Grajzar and Macedonian designer Biljana Klekačkoska intend to develop a common trade mark for their design jewellery.

designer lace from life itself: admiration of nature, emotions, and events. Her small shop is a luxurious bliss: butterflies and dragonflies weave dreams with their wings, a fragrance of carnations floats in the air, and showcases can be seen through a curtain made of lace snowflakes.

NATURAL ROPE SCREEN

Manca Ahlin is an architect who lives in New York and has been working with the design studio Archipelagos for the last six years. She has designed a lace screen for a Mediterranean restaurant in New York.

The screen is a piece of lace eleven metres long and three metres wide, made of natural rope.

“This is my best personal project so far, I designed it completely by myself” Manca says.

The project of revamping the restaurant was led by her colleague, while Manca was asked to create an interior design installation. “As this was something completely new, I first made an actual-size pattern with rope, so that the restaurant owner could get the idea what the final product would be. He was enthusiastic,” she says, explaining the creative process.

The lace screen is actually made in a very traditional two-dimensional technique, and if scaled down to the normal thread lace dimensions it would be difficult to notice a difference.

I actually braided the heavy ropes as I would have done with bobbins”, she explains, joking: “It was physically very demanding, so I had no need to go to the gym.” The theme – grapes and olives – of the lace reflects the type of restaurant, which offers Mediterranean cuisine, and echoes the name of the restaurant’s location: Flower District in Chelsea. “I chose hemp rope partly because of the Mediterranean atmosphere of the place and with the history of seafaring in mind, and partly because I wanted to use easy-care rope made of natural fibres.”

When asked whether the customers know that the screen of rope lace was made by a Slovenian she explains that “the staff know my work very well, as the screen was not made in the blink of an eye. I



Photo: Mantzalin archives

Manca Ahlin

Manca Ahlin works under the artistic name of Mantzalin. She lives in New York and works mostly as an architect; her own creative work is currently still a rare treat. In 1999 Slovenia’s Chamber of Crafts made her a Master of Arts and Crafts. Her talent was evident even in elementary school, when she won the first prize at the Idrija Lace Festival.

The process of creating the screen began by examining the interior of the restaurant, its type and location. She combined the Mediterranean atmosphere of the restaurant with the motif of olives and grapes; hemp rope used in seafaring was thus an obvious choice for the creation of a Mediterranean screen. The screen was actually constructed in the basement of the Slovenian St Cyril Church in New York.

In her signature creations Manca often uses recycled materials, while in her architecture work she follows the principle of making the structure blend with the natural environment. She also creates lace jewellery.

worked on it for a whole month. And the owner is also very keen to explain to his customers the story of the screen’s making. It is a fact that this is a signature design and is, even by New York standards, something unequalled, fresh and new.” It is no surprise then that Manca has already got a new contract: “The Stix Restaurant, set to be opened at a different location, does not want a replica of the screen, but a lace pattern application,” Manca explains.

LACE IS SLOVENIA’S IDENTITY SYMBOL

Lace, be it from Idrija, Žiri or elsewhere, is one of the most recognizable symbols of Slovenia’s identity.

There are more than one hundred lace-maker societies, sections and groups ac-

tive in Slovenia, not only in the two best known centres, Idrija and Žiri, but also in Železniki.

The mass embracing of lacemaking and the passing on of knowledge to young generations ensures the preservation of this traditional craftsmanship. Lace has always been a luxury item carrying a deep communicative value. Nowadays flax or cotton threads are no longer the only materials from which lace-makers create their masterpieces. Just as Tina Koder Grajzar and Manca Ahlin do, each with their own interpretation of the rich and luxurious lace from Slovenia.

Manca Ahlin designed a lace pattern for the screen that separates bar area from the restaurant seating.



DRUGA GODBA – THAT OTHER MUSIC FESTIVAL

Popular festival of the world's non-mainstream music

POLONA PREŠEREN

At the end of May, Ljubljana will again dance to the rhythms of music from all over the world staged by the *Druga Godba* music festival returning for its thirty-first year.

The *Druga Godba* Festival, meaning *That Other Music Festival*, presents music from across the globe. It is one of the most important music festivals in Central Europe; its concept, its new approaches and its enthusiasm for less well-known music are unique to this part of the world.

Based on an original concept, the Druga Godba Festival galvanises its audience with vigorously creative ethno and folk music, new urban music, and fusion of ethnic and modern musical approaches from around the world.

For its successful work, the *Druga Godba* Festival won the Župančič Award in 2006. This is the highest award conferred by the Municipality of Ljubljana for exceptional creations in art and culture, which enrich the cultural treasures of Slovenia's capital and are noted by the broader national and international arena for their excellence.

INSIGHT INTO THE TRADITIONS AND CULTURES OF VARIOUS NATIONS

Since its establishment in 1984, the festival has been improving its quality, looking for new approaches, revealing unknown music and territories. It gives its visitors an insight into the musical traditions and culture of different nations and is an important part of Ljubljana's festival scene.

For the last four years in a row, the *Druga Godba* Festival has been nominated as one of the 25 best international festivals by Songlines Magazine. The excellent festival programme also satisfied the professional public in 2014. The *Druga Godba* Institute, which

DRUGA GODBA

organises the festival, is a member of the most prominent organisation in the area of world music, namely the European Forum of Worldwide Music Festivals – EFWMF. This is a network of 43 festivals and 13 associate members from 20 European countries; it consists of festival organisers producing regular worldwide musical events that fulfil a specific artistic and quality profile.

The *Druga Godba* Festival is also actively engaged in other areas. In May 2008, it collaborated with the Slovenian Tourist Board on a campaign to promote Slovenia in the United States. Two special musical events were organised in New York City in cooperation with National Geographic Traveller – the first in Joe's Pub, the legendary jazz venue, which played host to the group Godalika and guests, as well as to Fake Orchestra. The second was organised at Town Hall and featured Laibach, Bratko Bibič and Guy Klucsek, Vasko Atanasovski, Marc Ribot and Greg Cohen, Brina, Zlatko Kaučič, Silence and Katalena.

THIS YEAR PROGRAMME

Between 28 and 30 May, the Ljubljana stages will host the following artists: AZIZA BRAHIM (Western Sahara/Spain), NOURA MINT SEYMALI (Mauritania), DENNIS BOVELL (U.K.) DJ set, HINDI ZAHRA (Morocco/France), TUNE-YARDS (U.S.A.), YASMINE HAMDAN (Lebanon), HAYVENLAR ALEMI (Turkey), SONS OF KEMET (U.K.), MADAME BAHEUX (Austria, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria), BOŽO VREČO (Bosnia and Herzegovina), SILVIA PEREZ CRUZ (Spain), KATALENA (Slovenia), BATIDA (Portugal, Angola).



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Self built pavilion

Architectural design by SoNo arhitekti d.o.o.

Construction by Lumar IG d.o.o

A close-up photograph of a dark-stained wooden egg tray with a grid-like structure. Several Easter eggs are nestled in the compartments. One egg in the upper right is plain white. Another egg in the middle left features a complex geometric pattern of white and brown lines. A third egg in the lower right is white with a delicate pattern of small dark dots. A fourth egg in the lower left is orange-brown with white bands and small circular perforations. The lighting is soft, highlighting the textures of the wood and the eggshells.

The painted
Easter eggs depicted in
this photograph are the work of
Franc Grom who has been artistically
decorating "Vrhnika Easter Eggs". They
are protected as an invention and
patented as an eggshell
decoration.