

The background of the entire page is a photograph of a vineyard in autumn. The vines in the foreground are covered in bright red and orange leaves. In the middle ground, there are several tall, thin evergreen trees. In the background, a white church with a tall, grey stone bell tower is visible. The sky is blue with some light clouds, and distant mountains can be seen on the horizon.

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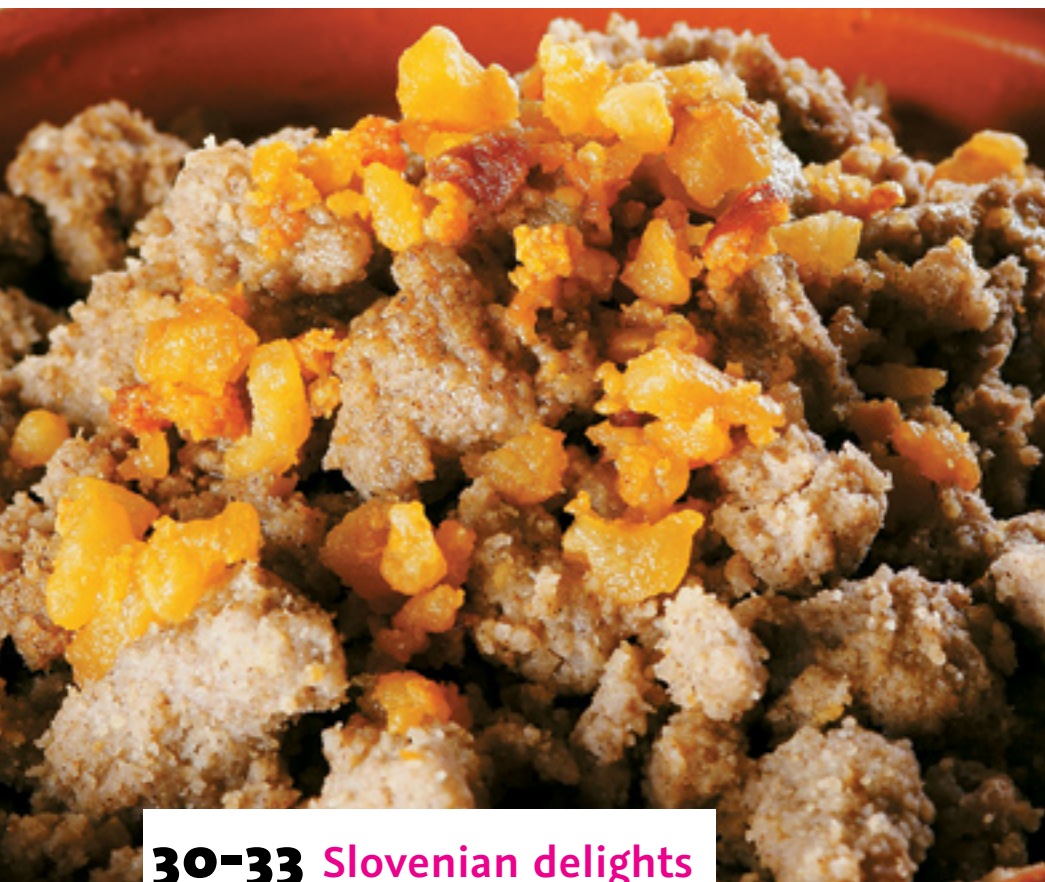
(business culture environment politics sports)

09

October 09

BLED STRATEGIC FORUM
ON THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND PERIOD AFTER IT

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Sinfo – Slovenian information

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Veronika Stabej

Different dialogues

After the brief summer, we have already marched resolutely into autumn, which is bringing quite a few shifts in many areas. The Government is determined to overcome the economic and financial crisis, and help for businesses will be enhanced by what is called economic diplomacy, which covers the activities of diplomatic missions in the area of promoting the Slovenian economy in foreign markets and thereby securing help for it in its internationalisation. Fulfilment of this challenging task will involve the services of Slovenian ambassadors working in almost 50 countries around the world.

The Politics of Economic Crisis: Redefining Economic and Geopolitical Landscapes in Europe and Eurasia was the title of the fourth international conference of the Bled Strategic Forum, which was attended by more than 420 foreign and Slovenian participants, including numerous senior politicians, heads of international organisations and business leaders. One of the panellists at the round table conference was Andreu Claret, executive director of the Anna Lindh Foundation, the Euro-Mediterranean foundation for intercultural dialogue, and we are publishing an interview with him. The guiding principle of the foundation is developing dialogue between Mediterranean cultures and civilisations, or as Mr. Claret says, "it is not about abstract cultures, but about the people who live in this region," and also about strengthening Euro-Mediterranean partnership, while the active cooperation of Slovenia in the foundation can contribute to the greater presence and recognisability of Slovenia in this region.

An intensive and innovative approach to strengthening Slovenian innovation and entrepreneurship has been taken by the restorer Igor Ravbar with his wooden masterpieces and by the agronomist Borut Benedejčič with his plans for revitalising the Karst. Read more about this in the section Our excellence.

In the letters from ambassadors we bring you up to date on efforts to secure respect of children's rights and on the years of Slovenia's foreign policy efforts to improve the position of the most vulnerable social groups, which include of course children and adolescents. Despite the fact that they are protected under the international Convention on the Rights of the Child, the rights of children are violated every day in many parts of the world. It is right for us to be aware of them, to draw attention to them and also to talk openly about them. During the Week of the Child, on 6 and 7 October 2009 Slovenia will host an International Conference on Children's Rights and Protection Against Violence, which we believe will contribute to improving the protection of these highly sensitive rights. You can read more on this in our upcoming issue.

Andrej Savelli

Breakthrough in Slovenia-Croatia talks

On 11 September, in talks between Prime Ministers Borut Pahor and Jadranka Kosor in Ljubljana, Slovenia and Croatia came to an agreement on the continuation of Croatia's EU accession negotiations and on resolving their border dispute through the mediation of the European Union. Croatian Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor sent to the Swedish EU Presidency a statement that no document in Croatia's accession would prejudice the border.

In the letter, she also apprised the Swedish Presidency of the EU of the agreement between the two sides to resolve the border dispute through international arbitration, as proposed by the European Commission, and negotiations over an arbitration agreement will continue where they were left off on 15 June 2009. At that time the European Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, presented to Slovenia and Croatia the European Commission's April proposal, partly supplemented by Slovenian proposals, and this was acceptable for Slovenia, while Croatia rejected it, claiming that Rehn's April proposal was "take it or leave it". After this the European Commission terminated its involvement in resolving the border issue.

In the new agreement, Croatia made a commitment to resolve the border issue in accordance with the key priority tasks of the accession partnership with the EU by mutual agreement, and that an agreement on the method of resolving the border would be reached before a vote on the accession treaty in the Slovenian parliament. In exchange, the Slovenian Government, as was decided consensually on 10 September, proposed to the foreign policy and EU affairs committees that Slovenia would withdraw its restraints on the negotiating process between Croatia and the European Union.

The two prime ministers also pointed out that this is an agreement that serves both nations and countries, and the interests of both countries have been taken into account. It is a joint success and a "win-win" situation in which everyone is a winner, they stressed. According to Mr. Pahor, the agreement will enable the two countries perhaps indeed to open a new chapter in their relations, since alongside the border issue there are other open questions in need of resolving.

On 15th September the parliamentary committees for European Affairs and foreign relations gave the green light for continued Croatian accession negotiations, while the Swedish Presidency of the EU has called an intergovernmental conference for 2 October in order to continue the negotiations.



Slovenian and Croatian prime ministers, Borut Pahor and Jadranka Kosor



photo: Bor Siana/Bobo

PM Borut Pahor visits Rome and the Vatican

Prime Minister Borut Pahor paid a working visit to Italy on 18 September, focusing in his talks with his counterpart Silvio Berlusconi on economic cooperation between the countries and the possibility of the neighbours' companies jointly entering foreign markets. The pair also debated budget drafting in times of crisis. They moreover touched the issue of the Slovenian minority in Italy, with Pahor expressing his hope that Italy will fulfil all its obligations towards the Slovenian community in the country. Berlusconi assured Pahor that in the proposed budget for next year the Italian government would not make any cuts to the minority funding. Pahor and Berlusconi also discussed the planned gas terminals in Aquilina (Zavljje) near Trieste, which Slovenia opposes for environmental reasons. In the morning, Pahor also met Vatican's Secretary of State Tarcisio Bertone and Slovenian Cardinal Franc Rode.

New content makes Vlada.si Government portal even more user-friendly

The Government's web portal www.vlada.si is introducing two new services to try to make its work even more open to the public. The first change is a result of the desire for equal access to information and equal inclusion of deaf and hard of hearing persons in the living environment. The Government Communication Office, following an initiative of the Association of Interpreters for Slovenian Sign Language and the Association of Societies of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing of Slovenia submitted to the Slovenian Prime Minister, and in the desire to help remove obstacles in communication owing to hearing difficulties, which make it harder for the deaf and hard of hearing to access information, decided to broadcast press conferences following meetings of the Government on the website www.vlada.si additionally in Slovenian sign language. The first broadcast in sign language was made on 27 August 2009.

The project "predlagam.vladi.si" (I propose.to the government.si)

is part of wider efforts to include citizens in processes of shaping Government policies and measures. The project opens up a new communication channel between citizens and the state and among citizens themselves. The main aim of the project is to encourage the inhabitants of Slovenia to communicate opinions, initiatives and proposals for dealing with socially burning issues. The proposals that garner the majority support of registered users will be forwarded by the Office to the competent Government body, which will have to take a view regarding the proposal. Establishment of the web tool "predlagam.vladi.si" is envisaged by the end of October 2009.

Conference on illegal migrations, organised crime, corruption and terrorism

Brdo pri Kranju was the venue for the 9th Regional Ministerial Conference on illegal migrations, organised crime, corruption and terrorism. The first topic of the conference was visa liberalisation, which Slovenia highlighted as a priority task even during its Presidency of the EU, and in one and a half years there have already been visible results of this effort, since three countries will in all probability enter into a visa-free regime for travel to countries of the European Union at the end of the year. The aim of the visa liberalisation is the mobility of citizens, promoting contacts between people and economic cooperation between countries. In the Brdo process, Slovenia is active in two other initiatives, specifically in the project to transfer best practices in the field of the fight against terrorism, which also has support in the Swedish Presidency of the European Union, and the other project is an assessment of the threat from organised crime in south-eastern Europe. At this year's regional conference in Brdo, a Memorandum of Agreement was also signed between participating countries in the ILECU project, the aim of which is for all countries of the Western Balkans to establish centres for international police cooperation.

Calls for fulfilment of the Austrian State Treaty

On 26 August Slovenia was visited by the Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann. Slovenia used the occasion to call on Austria to implement the Austrian State Treaty (AST). Prime Minister Borut Pahor reminded his Austrian counterpart that this was an international obligation on his country. Faymann, however, stated that the issue of bilingual topography required a political solution. Prime Minister Pahor added that he could not agree with such an interpretation. Slovenian President Danilo Türk also pointed out in talks with the Austrian Chancellor that the problem of bilingual signs in Austrian Carinthia was a subject of fulfilment under the AST and fulfilment of the decisions of the Austrian Constitutional Court. He added that a determination in carrying out the decisions will also help in creating the necessary political

conditions for them. Otherwise Pahor and Faymann devoted great attention in their talks to economic cooperation between Slovenia and Austria. As the Austrian Chancellor pointed out, economic relations between the two countries, even in the current difficult economic conditions, are good and stable, but they could be improved further.



Austrian Chancellor Werner Faymann and Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor addressing reporters after talks.

Slovenia and China seek to enhance relations

On 27th August the Deputy Prime Minister of China, Hui Liangyu, and a sizeable economic delegation arrived for a three-day official visit to Slovenia.

Prime Minister Borut Pahor and Hui affirmed the good relations between the two countries, especially in the economic sphere, and they expressed their interest in enhanced cooperation in this area. Pahor and Hui also talked about the economic crisis.

The Slovenian Prime Minister detailed for Mr. Hui the efforts of the Slovenian Government for Slovenia to weather the economic crisis, including through an intensive presence in the Chinese market. In this respect Slovenia ascribes great importance to its participation at the world exhibition in Shanghai in 2010, stressed Pahor.

Hui was also received by Slovenian President Danilo Türk, who highlighted the importance of Slovenian transport routes for improving economic cooperation between the two countries. Otherwise the two focused their talks on the fulfilment of agreements concluded by the Slovenian President with the highest Chinese representatives during his state visit to China last October. They also devoted considerable attention to cultural cooperation.

A press conference of visiting Chinese Vice Premier Hui Liangyu (left) and Slovenian Prime Minister Borut Pahor after a meeting.



photo: Tamino Petelinšek/STA

Bled Strategic Forum

Vesna Žarkovič, Government Communication Office, photo: STA

ON THE ECONOMIC CRISIS AND PERIOD AFTER IT

On the last day of August the town of Bled hosted the Bled Strategic Forum, at which more than 420 Slovenian and foreign politicians, business people and analysts discussed the economic crisis and its consequences for the economic and geopolitical situation in

Europe and Eurasia. The host, Foreign Minister Samuel Žbogar, expressed great satisfaction at the course of the Forum. This year's Forum was the fourth of its kind, and within the region it is gaining recognition, something indicated by the high attendance.



The Foreign Ministry organised the Forum in cooperation with the Centre for European Perspective, and regarding the topic of this year's Forum – the economic crisis – the organisers also highlighted that the costs of this year's Forum were significantly lower than previous years. Participants also expressed satisfaction at the topics discussed at the Forum, which must certainly have offered them some real answers to the challenges of this crisis. Indeed the crisis can also act as a catalyst for finding solutions, Žbogar pointed out. The Foreign Minister also announced that, based on the discussions and conclusions of the Forum, the Foreign Ministry would be formulating certain guidelines to be used by the Slovenian diplomatic service, which started its regular annual consultation following the Forum. Slovenia's diplomatic service made good use of the Forum at Bled to hold various bilateral meetings, in particular Sunday's meeting with Croatian Foreign Minister Gordan Jandroković and Slovakian Foreign Minister Miroslav Lajčák. A special success of the Forum was the meeting between Lajčák and his Hungarian counterpart, Peter Balazs, at which they agreed on a calming of the tensions between their two countries and on a meeting soon between their respective heads of government.

We need a new level of awareness

The second day of the Bled Forum took place in four panels and one round table, at which participants talked about the crisis as a threat to security and development, about energy security and the recession, about the issue of values before and after the financial crisis and about the economic challenges of the Western Balkans and regional stability in Eastern Europe and the Caspian region.

In the first panel it was found that the right response to the threat to security and development in the world posed by the crisis, lies in increasing international cooperation in seeking joint answers and policies, and in resisting the temptations of protectionism. Economic security is much more important for ordinary people than 'classical', military security. The unemployment caused by the



The panel economic challenges of the western Balkans at the 4th Bled Strategic Forum

crisis is a massive problem that can create major tensions and instability, stressed the panel, which was also attended by Croatian Foreign Minister Jandroković.

The second panel highlighted the fact that energy security must be based on ensuring energy efficiency, solidarity among countries and a spreading of sources. Alongside renewable energy sources, this last factor will be ensured by the Nabucco gas pipeline, for which an agreement was reached in the middle of July between Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Austria and Turkey, panellists determined.

There was also an interesting panel on the economic challenges of the Western Balkans, at which participants found that if the region just over a year ago was in an enviable economic position, following the spread of the crisis the countries of that region are facing major problems. The IMF has reinforced its role in the region, while regional countries are appealing to the EU for help, and greater mutual cooperation in the region is needed, participants found.

Following the presentation of individual panels, in response to a question from the audience whether in this new world into which we are headed, there is not a fear that universal values might not survive, Žbogar said that we need a new level of awareness to resolve the current problems. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu then added that this is a question of continuity and change, where all the old wisdom will not be forgotten, but will be continued in a new form, in a new system.

On the sidelines of the Forum there was also a series of bilateral meetings. One with particular importance was the meeting between Pahor, Žbogar and Jandroković regarding the border dispute between the two countries and Slovenia's restraints on Croatia's negotiations with the EU. No final agreement was reached, but they communicated that talks were going well and expressed optimism that talks would be concluded by the end of the year.



Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Immigration of Luxembourg, Jean Asselborn: "Global problems require global responses. Today's priority is to revitalise the multilateral system. In the 20th century the world became much more open and global, with societies also becoming significantly more mutually interactive."



Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu:

“We have to change our own thinking in order to change institutional functioning; if the safety of a child in Somalia is not just as important as the safety of our own child, then we are not yet thinking sufficiently globally. The new silk route in the sense of gas and oil pipelines is not a thing for international competition, but for international cooperation. Western civilisations must prepare and also accept multiculturalism.”



State Minister for Foreign Affairs of India, Preneet Kaur:

“The fight against international terrorism nowadays cannot succeed without international cooperation. The world needs a new global leadership that will be based on multilateralism. Today the world is too small for everyone to go their own way, a new system of global leadership needs to be implemented with full flexibility, since the world is constantly developing and in changes requires a creative way of thinking.”

The economy tops Slovenia's foreign policy priorities

Following the conclusion of the Forum, on 1 September the regular annual consultation of the Slovenian diplomatic service took place at Brdo pri Kranju. The consultation addressed topics related to the Western Balkans, economic diplomacy and new global challenges. For the 15th time now, Slovenian ambassadors from around the world gathered together. As Prime Minister Borut Pahor affirmed, the government is determined to involve the diplomatic service as much as possible in dealing with the economic crisis, and is therefore strengthening the economic orientation of foreign policy. He appealed to the assembled ambassadors, whom Slovenia has posted in almost 50 countries, to make every effort to help the Slovenian economy and contribute to strengthening economic cooperation. He also called on them to seek out intensively and innovatively new possibilities for strengthening economic cooperation with Slovenia. In strengthening the “Slovenia brand”, the diplomatic service is of great importance. The state plays a vital role in companies entering and becoming established in new markets – and from this aspect the Arab countries, for instance, are very interesting – and in promoting foreign investment in Slovenian manufacturing, while it also provides important help in participation at various fairs and establishing business clubs abroad.



Foreign Minister Samuel Žbogar:

At the Ministry we are aware of the need for an “appropriately planned economic foreign policy that is adapted to the requirements

of the times, especially regarding the current economic situation in the world and in Slovenia. In recent months we have indeed bolstered the economic diplomatic effort. Since modern diplomacy is to a large extent also economic diplomacy, the Foreign Ministry is once again becoming the central body and coordinator of activities in this field. I have already signed an agreement with the Minister for the Economy, Matej Lahovnik, for the transfer of the economic diplomatic effort to the Foreign Ministry. Working in the field of economic affairs is a primary task of Slovenian ambassadors, while the Foreign Ministry is also planning a structural reorganisation of the Ministry and the network of diplomatic missions through expansion of the existing network of economic diplomatic advisers, who will identify specific business opportunities for Slovenian companies abroad, and by opening new embassies where the interests of the economy are greatest. First on the horizon is the opening of an embassy in Albania.

Alongside this there will also be the continued practice of visits by trade delegations, which accompany the President, Prime Minister and Foreign Minister. Prime Minister Borut Pahor is himself heading to Montenegro, Egypt, Libya and the United Arab Emirates, while Slovenian President Danilo Türk is going to Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, and in the coming year to Kuwait, Qatar and Oman.

The Ministry also supports the further development of Slovenian business clubs abroad, and is talking about expanding the network of honorary consuls with good economic backgrounds and strengthening ties with Slovenians in neighbouring countries and around the world. In order for Slovenian companies to secure competitive advantages in foreign markets, especially in the Western Balkans, there is a determination to instrumentalise bilateral development assistance, while the Ministry is aware of the great importance of multilateral economic diplomacy, where a significant component of economic diplomacy is an appropriate visa policy.

Julija Sardelić, Agata Sardelić,

Photo: From the photo workshop ‘You See Me, I See You’, Kamenci, June 2009

“SOROTIJE – JUNCTURE” THE ROMA SETTLEMENT OF KAMENCI

It is characteristic of Prekmurje, the northeasternmost part of Slovenia, that apart from Slovenians other nationalities and ethnic communities live there. The Roma constitute one such community. Members of this community also live in Kamenci, situated in the Municipality of Črenšovci, close to the main road between the towns of Lendava and Murska Sobota. A total of 127 people live in Kamenci, among them about 50 children, representing approximately 40 percent of the inhabitants in this settlement.

However, Kamenci is not merely one of the Roma settlements. On the contrary, it is known especially for the events, efforts and activities that take place there, ensuring its unique position in the region as well as in the wider area. That is to say, the Kamenci settlement is a specific “SOROTIJE” (in the Roma language) or “JUNCTURE” – on one hand, a place where the past encounters the future, and, on the other, a place where people of different nationalities, professions and cultures meet.

In the Kamenci settlement, the Municipality of Črenšovci and “MISIJA *S” – Association for the Sustainable Development of Pomurje, in cooperation with the established Roma Association “ROMANO PEJTAUŠAGO”, are developing and implementing “a model of good practice for ensuring equal opportunities and for improving the socio-economic position of the underprivileged Roma community”.

The basic principles of the Roma development partnership regarding development and implementation of the model of good practice in the Kamenci settlement are:



Roma people are not a problem, but a source of great potential.

Roma cultures are equal to other, non-Roma cultures. Projects for Roma people can only be created in partnership and with their active participation, and upon

taking co-responsibility for the successful realisation of these projects (therefore, they must be created in Roma settlements and not in offices). All projects for Roma people must take their specific lifestyle, culture and values into consideration.



The development of the model of good practice in the Kamenci settlement proceeds in two directions: in the direction of creating conditions for the development of social-entrepreneurial activities for the Roma people, and in the direction of systematic development of the social skills, creative potentials and inborn talents of the young Roma population.

Upon studying scientific sources and socialising with the Roma people from Kamenci, we became aware of the wealth of Roma cultural-ethnological heritage, customs and values, and we understood that this wealth represents obvious but still unused development potential. It is also threatened in the absence of planned preservation, since the Roma cultural tradition that has passed from generation to generation only as an oral tradition is falling more and more into disuse in the present time. To protect these traditions from extinction and therefore from the interruption of a rich cultural connection between the past and the present due to the pressures of modern de-traditionalisation,

globalisation and individualisation of social life, we partnered with the inhabitants of the Kamenci settlement to primarily found the development of Kamenci on preserving Roma cultural-historical potential. We are also dedicated to their ennobling in the form of an integrated and innovative cultural-tourist product incorporating elements of experiences of diversity and respect for foreign identities and pride in our own: "SOROTIJME – JUNCTURE" – KAMENCI: ROMA CULTURAL-TOURIST VILLAGE (for which there is without doubt substantial interest and demand in the cultural-tourism market).

Therefore, the Roma culture in Kamenci is being systematically preserved, although it is still marked by a sort of struggle for recognition, namely to be recognised as a part of European cultural heritage which was more or less overlooked in the past. In Kamenci, there is the first and only Roma museum in Slovenia, being part of the efforts for preserving the Roma historical memory. Next to it, the "Roma

Healing Grove" arose, as a result of one of the projects, also presenting a part of the Roma cultural heritage – the tradition of Roma complementary and alternative medicine, since in the past it was mainly Roma women who were known as folk alternative medicine practitioners. In the grove you can also find sculptures made of scrap metal, designed and constructed by academic sculptors in cooperation with Roma children and young people, who actively participated in the creative planning and realisation of these works of art as assistants to the sculptors.

Kamenci is not just a "SOROTIJME – JUNCTURE" with the past, but also with the future. The future of Kamenci is represented by its most important resource: children and young people. The Roma development partnership pays special attention precisely to the systematic development and ennoblement of this potential. We permanently carry out educational and creative activities for the systematic development of the indigenous potentials of Roma children and young

people, the goal of which is to ensure that the young Roma population has more equal participation in educational, work and social processes in general. In the Kamenci settlement, there are already traditional Roma summer camps: interdisciplinary creative workshops for the development of social skills, creativity and the inborn talents of the young Roma population. So, this summer, within the framework of the "DROM – POT" project (co-financed by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism and the EEA Financial Mechanism), the seventh traditional Roma summer camp Kamenci 2009 took place. At the camp, children and young people could participate in the creative workshop "ROMA PAINT", the ecological camp "ECO ROMA", the social-motivational workshop "ROMA SOCIO", the music-dance workshop "ROMA DANCE" and the literary creative workshop "ROMA LIT".



The Kamenci settlement is thus a "SOROTIJME – JUNCTURE" that lies between the past and the future, and also between different nationalities and creative potentials of the living culture – artists (writers, sculptors, painters, photographers, filmmakers, etc.). In Kamenci, people of different nationalities, cultures and professions meet at various events, such as those like International Roma Day, literary evenings, roundtable talks, film evenings, musical events and so on – accompanied by excellent Roma coffee. After all, in Kamenci we are building the bridges that connect us, and at the same time we are tearing down the walls of prejudice that separate us.

“European Route of Roma Culture and Heritage”

The official launch of the Council of Europe project "European Route of Roma Culture and Heritage" will take place in Lendava and in the Roma settlement of Kamenci on 7 and 8 October 2009. The event is being organised by the Government Office for National Minorities of the Republic of Slovenia and the Council of Europe within the framework of the Slovenian Chairmanship of the Council.

and promoting Roma communities and their creativity.

The project will link places where Roma live and where the founding organisations are based. Through different tourist and educational activities as well as opportunities for direct encounters with Roma communities and artists, the Route will contribute to better understanding of Roma culture and to breaking down prejudices and stereotypes.

At the moment, this project is one of the most important initiatives of the Council of Europe. Slovenia is already actively involved in the project itself, since two of the strongest partners in the network – the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and the Romano Pejtaušago Kamenci Association (Roma Friendship Association of Kamenci) – come precisely from our country.



Vesna Žarkovič, photo: personal archive

ANDREU CLARET: THE TARGETS AND FACTORS OF CULTURAL DIALOGUE ARE NOT ABSTRACT 'CULTURES'

The Anna Lindh Foundation, based in Alexandria, was established in 2005 and links 43 countries. It took its name from the former Swedish Foreign Minister, Anna Lindh, who was tragically assassinated in 2003. The main aims of the foundation are to develop dialogue between Mediterranean cultures and civilisations, and to strengthen the development and establishment of Euro-Mediterranean partnerships. The Slovenian national network, which is an association of non-governmental and non-profit organisations, has 34 members. Andreu Claret, Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation, emphasises that “the targets and factors of cultural dialogue are not abstract ‘cultures’, but men and women who live in the Euromed region, with their social, political and personal problems, beliefs and dreams.”

Mr Claret, how does the Anna Lindh Foundation (ALF) bring people together to work for dialogue between cultures?

It is with people who live in the Euromed region that we need to tackle the historical misunderstandings and gaps which exist between us and which dramatically affect our mutual perceptions and our capacity to work for a shared future. That is why most of our activities, in the fields of culture, education, religion and media, are oriented to getting people to meet and work together on projects, the added value of which is prepared and implemented by organisations in Europe, the Arab Mediterranean countries, Turkey and Israel. This exercise of gathering people from all over the region is at the core of our programme of activities – those which are directly organised by the Foundation and its networks and those which are financed through the calls for proposals we launch every year.

How many projects are there at the moment?

We now have more than 150 projects running from the 43 countries, which means that we have hundreds of civil society organisations on both shores of the Mediterranean working together for intercultural dialogue.

You emphasise that intercultural coexistence remains one of the

major challenges of our times. How will you achieve this?

Coexistence is a word usually associated with processes of peace making. For the ALF, it has a broader scope, related to potential lines of conflict which are not necessarily geographical borders. We think there is now a growing need to face the cultural and social tensions that have emerged among cultural communities, particularly in some European countries deeply affected by the economic crisis. Being aware of that challenge, the ALF will make intercultural coexistence a priority in its Annual Work Plan for 2010.

What is the essence of the new programme phase, 2009 to 2011? And what are the planned Foundation events? Which are the most popular and most supported?

The essence of our programme is activating civil society in favour of dialogue, coexistence and mutual respect. We do organising activities in collaboration with civil society organisations and fund projects through the networks.

Recently we launched an initiative called “Restore the Trust – Rebuild Bridges”, which has received significant support from the field. It was our response to the war in Gaza, which was a striking challenge for the Foundation. Nine months later we can say that we had the

right answer: avoiding the dramatic logic of war, looking with hope towards a future of peace and coexistence, focusing on cultural dialogue, laying the groundwork with our networks, partnering with those who share our values and working with the civil society to rebuild some of the broken bridges.

The Foundation also has an institutional responsibility in building a social and human dimension of the Union for the Mediterranean...

That is why our programme for the next year will revolve around two main projects: a large forum open to more than 400 organisations in our networks, which will take place in Barcelona under the Spanish Presidency of the European Union in March 2010, and the launching of the first Anna Lindh Report on Intercultural Trends, which will become a very important tool for the Foundation, giving a more scientific basis to our work and providing the Foundation with a new advocacy role within the institutions of the Euromed region. Both initiatives are oriented to making the Foundation a reference in the field of intercultural dialogue in terms of ideas and action.

In the last decade the Mediterranean has been portrayed and perceived mainly as a frontier. How do you see the two shores of the Mediterranean?

The perception of the Mediterranean as a frontier or as the place where the “clash of civilizations” takes place corresponds, of course, to the huge gap in wealth that exists between the two shores, to certain political developments and to the existence of threats which, from a European perspective, “come from the South”. But if we go beyond the stereotype and the simplification, we can see the shores closer than they are in our minds. Economic relations, human movements, cultural exchanges and trends of globalisation are creating common ground for a common narrative and shared future.

INTERVIEW

The Anna Lindh Foundation

runs the largest Euro-Mediterranean Network, made up of hundreds of NGOs, universities, associations, public institutions, non-profit foundations, local authorities and private companies, all of them coordinated by the Head of National Network of each country. The members of the Networks cover most of the fields covered in the first three years: cultural and artistic activities, youth and education, democracy and community development, humans rights, migration issues, sustainable development, gender, heritage, media and religion. The National Networks participate in the setting of our programme and the grants policy, and develop their own initiatives, launching projects in collaboration with other Networks. The Foundation supports the Networks, facilitating collaboration among each other, improving their capacity building, providing them information and logistical assistance, training their members, and giving them the opportunity of being owners of the Euromed Partnership.



2800 civil society organisations. These networks together constitute one of the largest networks in the Euromed region. This is an influential asset for the Foundation, which makes it a unique institution, with an intergovernmental dimension and, at the same time, a civil society vocation. The ALF networks had a role from the very beginning in forming the programme of the Foundation, through a permanent process of consultation and the Annual Meetings. Their organisations participate actively in activities organised by the Foundation and they are very active in the presentation of projects for the calls for proposals we launch every year.

Despite all this, the gap in mutual perceptions between people across the region remains and in some cases has significantly deteriorated as a result of conflict and war and economic crisis. How do you explain this?

Because in recent years that gap has been fuelled by the persistence of economic and social disparities and some biased and unilateral answers to the threat of terrorism and the situation in the Middle East. The hope of many people is that the new approach of the international community to the problems of the region may create a basis for bridging the gap which exists in the mutual perceptions.

Combatants for Peace, a civil movement jointly established by Palestinian and Israeli individuals,

has been officially announced as the winner of the Anna Lindh Euro-Med Award for the Dialogue between Cultures 2009. Can you tell us a bit more about this?

The award to Combatants for Peace, promoted by the networks of the Foundation, was one of the most important achievements of 2009. It underlines the will of the Foundation to be active in the promotion of a culture of peace, which is essential for cultural dialogue in that region. I also want to stress the importance of the second-place award, which went to History in Action, an organisation integrated by young historians from Croatia, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia whose aim is to work for a common narrative of the history of the societies of the Balkans – a purpose which is very much in line with the mission of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

How is the Foundation funded and how can one apply for funds?

The Foundation is funded by the European Commission and the Foundation's 43 member countries, and most of the funding is devoted to activities carried out in the field by civil society organisations. The calls for proposals are launched with an open public procedure on our website. Unfortunately, we don't have enough funding to respond positively to all the fascinating projects we receive and which are evaluated according to international and transparent standards.

I want to stress that the Anna Lindh Foundation is much more than a fund-raising organisation. It is an institution in the service of networking and mobilisation, and a platform for those who want to participate in building a strong Euro-Mediterranean network for intercultural dialogue.

In what way is the Foundation present in Slovenia?

Slovenia has been an active country in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership from the very beginning of its participation in the Barcelona Process, and particularly under its EU Presidency in 2008. This commitment contributed to the election

of Ambassador Veronika Stabej as Chairperson of the Board of Governors. Another expression of that initiative is the presence of Nevenka Koprivsek, Bunker Productions, in the Advisory Council of the Foundation.

The existence of a vibrant Slovenian network involved in cultural and artistic activities, with more than 50 NGOs and other organisations, has contributed very much to that process and to defending the idea in the Slovenian civil society that the country can develop its Mediterranean dimension as a vital aspect of its identity.

In 2007, five programmes from Slovenia were supported, specifically four translation projects and one cooperation project. This is the Hallerstein project, being conducted by MMC Kibla of Maribor, as part of which it linked up with partners in Austria, the Czech Republic, Portugal and China.

Last year, a full 19 applications were supported in Slovenia, of which 12 were translation projects and six were cooperation projects, and the Slovenian Youth Theatre (Slovensko mladinsko gledališče) became an "ambassador" for intercultural dialogue. The call for 2009 comprises two sections: support for projects where the emphasis is on cooperation projects with third countries and support for the functioning of organisations.

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Vesna Bertoneclj Popit, DELO, photo: STA

While the biggest global credit rating house, D & B, has reduced the credit rating for several countries, Slovenia has kept its 2C rating, although given that August showed a negative trend, it is possible that the Slovenian rating might slip, too.

Although economic conditions should finally show a slight improvement in the final quarter of this year, and owing to the greater influx of orders some companies are reintroducing the 40-hour working week – which had previously been cut to 36 or 32 hours – the majority of companies that published data on their half-year operations by the end of August showed both lower earnings and markedly lower profits for the first six months, while for some the net profit of last year's first half was changed into a loss in the first six months of this year. There is only a handful of companies performing better this year than in the first half of last year, when there was still no hint of the crisis. On the other hand, now some are saying that they sensed the coming crisis back in 2006, something that confirms the explanations of economic experts that the crisis, which has gripped the entire world, could not suddenly strike the Earth overnight.

Although companies can simply ascribe their poorer results to the economic crisis, it should not be overlooked that the value added of Slovenia's economy is too low, with the average per employee last year amounting to EUR 35,632, which is at the tail-end of the European Union. With such low value added per employee, for the same revenue the Slovenian economy must export more than economies exporting products with significantly higher value added. Here, however, there will be problems making comparisons regarding this particular indicator, since the reduction in the number of employees in the majority of companies has increased value added per employee on the surface, although no such thing has happened.

The Secretary General of the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce, Samo Hribar Milič, states that the majority of Slovenian exports are generated by large companies, and that Slovenian exports are excessively



The Secretary General of the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce, Samo Hribar Milič, states that the majority of Slovenian exports are generated by large companies

concentrated in the markets of our direct vicinity. According to Hribar, some 90 percent of Slovenian exports are generated in a circle stretching a thousand kilometres from Ljubljana. The Slovenian Chamber of Commerce is therefore proposing that companies direct their efforts more towards the markets of the former Soviet Union, former Yugoslavia, the Arab countries and the markets of Brazil, India, South Korea and Turkey, something that in the current crisis conditions would have a beneficial effect on Slovenian exports, which have fallen considerably this year under the impact of the crisis, following high growth in past years. Recently Slovenia was visited by a sizeable economic delegation from China, a country which despite the economic crisis has more than 7 percent growth, and which, according to Samo Hribar Milič of the Chamber, can seriously compete with Slovenia in all products.

This year to support additional tourism promotion the Ministry of the Economy allocated to 25 Slovenian tourist organisations two million euros of funding from the European Regional Development Fund. According to Dimitrij Piciga, director of the Slovenian Tourist Board, investments for instance in the Japanese market

four years ago yielded dividends, with some 23,000 Japanese tourists visiting Slovenia then, and this year 95,000 are expected. In the future a similar number of tourists should visit Slovenia from India and China, so the Slovenian Tourist Board is investing in promoting Slovenia in those two countries.

Slovenian health resorts, which are an important part of Slovenia's tourist attractions, were visited in the first seven months of this year by 369,000 guests, which is 2.4 percent more than in the same period last year, while the number of overnights increased by 2.8 percent. In particular there has been a marked increase in the number of overnights by guests from Italy, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro, while the new record-holders are guests from France.

There are also 630 Slovenian farmers involved in tourism as a supplementary activity, and of these 250 have guest rooms with a total of 2,500 beds. Farms can acquire the status of ecological tourist farm, vineyard farm and family, cyclist and disabled-friendly farm. The highest numbers of visitors come from Germany, Austria, Italy and Croatia.

In August Slovenia experienced deflation, which has become customary for the summer months in recent years.

Meanwhile the Government is drafting a budget for the coming two years and is thereby attempting, despite the difficulty obtaining revenue to fill the state treasury, to reverse certain current trends, where the majority of the budget was used up in advance. Partly owing to the need to mitigate social hardship, the Government has been negotiating with social partners in the public sector over limiting wage growth, something agreed upon with the previous Government in more favourable economic times.



Independent strategic adviser Boštjan Ložar

Independent strategic adviser Boštjan Ložar has found, however, that in the long term the only successful social state is one based on a globally competitive economy, an efficient public sector and the awareness of elites that the wealth created must be at least evenly distributed.

While it still appeared in 2007 that Slovenia would be able to maintain the balance between emissions and its commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, owing especially to the increase in transit traffic the obligations regarding emission reductions will not be met. For this reason, in the coming four years Slovenia will have to pay 80 million euros in penalties and should supposedly buy emission coupons for that value. The environmental association Greenslo proposes, however, that the costs of purchasing emission coupons should be covered by those causing the emissions. Relative to the base year, problems are also being experi-



Janez Kopač, head of the Energy Directorate at the Ministry of the Economy

enced with emission reductions in Austria, Finland, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain. At the end of 2008 the net worth of Slovenian mutual funds amounted to EUR 1.505 billion, and at the end of June 2009 it stood at EUR 1.65 billion. At the end of June Slovenia's mutual funds had 303,718 depositors, while at the end of last year there was the higher number of 397,472 depositors. Owing to the reduced number of depositors and invested funds, some management companies are in serious difficulties, while elsewhere the problems are moderate, so numerous fund management companies are laying off employees.

Slovenian manufacturers are also reducing employee levels, with the total number of unemployed coming very close to 90,000 in July, and there are fears that the expectations of a hundred thousand registered unemployed by the end of the year might even be exceeded. For the record, after the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the former Yugoslav market, the highest the number of registered unemployed reached was a little over 130,000. This year, given the circumstances, there was a big increase in the number of self-employed persons. According to data from the Slovenian Employment Service, in the first half of this year there were 2,558 self-employment registrations, and in the first seven months 3,383.

For some time now Slovenia has been considering a new block at the Krško nuclear power plant. However, as explained by Janez Kopač, head of the Energy Directorate at the Ministry of the Economy, it will first be necessary to bring the number 2 block into the national energy programme and to carry out all the necessary procedures. This means the project should be ripe for a decision after 2013 or 2014. Yet since the project will be very expensive and Slovenia will almost certainly not be able to finance it alone, it will need to draw several foreign partners into the project. In this context Kopač responded to certain reports on such plans in Italy.

Meanwhile reports have also surfaced that certain details regarding the construction of gas terminals in the Bay of Trieste have been falsified, for which reason the Government has demanded the correct details and new talks on the potential harm and threat of the terminals for Slovenia and its sea, and if such an agreement is not possible, it has threatened action in the European Court.

At the site of Ljubljana's Kolizej building, which is a protected monument but is falling into ruin and is not safe for habitation, a new Kolizej building, set to include a hotel and opera house, should be built by 2015. The building, which should preserve part of the current structure, will be 75 metres high, which is as high as Ljubljana's Nebotičnik building, and the cost of the new Kolizej should exceed EUR 200 million.



photo: Paweł Flato

Maud de Boer-Buquicchi, Acting Secretary General, Council of Europe

Children are not mini-human beings with mini-human rights. This may be a simple phrase but it encapsulates the very essence and importance of the Council of Europe programme, 'Building a Europe for and with Children'. Our strategy 2009-2011 focuses on three complementary areas; the promotion of child participation, the eradication of all forms of violence against children and the promotion of child-friendly justice.

Children's rights: learning by enjoying

In the Council of Europe we see human rights education both as a way of securing the future of democracy and as a way of empowering children in their daily lives as children, so that they can stand up for their own rights like any other person. It is also important to remember that education is not "just for children"; adults too need to learn, in particular those working for and with children. This is the "raison d'être" of our teacher-training methodologies on children's rights education and on violence at school.

The bottom-line, however, is that, when it comes to children's rights, the best way for children to learn about them is by enjoying them. The main aim of our work on child participation seeks to give children access to all decision- and policy-making processes that concern them at local, national and international levels and ensure that their involvement in these processes is feasible, meaningful and sustainable.

Addressing all forms of violence against children

Violence against children remains widespread and occurs in many forms and settings; from physical and emotional violence at home and school, to sexual violence in the media, online and in state institutions. Violence occurs in every country in Europe, irrespective of people's geographical origin or social stratum and what is particularly striking is that society often tolerates and even condones some

forms of violence against children. Social and legal acceptance of corporal punishment of children is an illustration of the different, lower status that our society grants to children. Through its campaign "Raise your hand against smacking!", the Council of Europe wants to eliminate the most common form of violence, but also to insist on the fact that children are holders of human rights and are entitled to more, and not less protection.

Through our action, we endeavour to assist countries in devising integrated strategies against violence and to design norms, policies and awareness raising tools to address specific forms of violence. The new Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse is a good example of this comprehensive approach and alongside our call for state ratification, we shall also launch in 2010 a Europe-wide campaign against sexual violence. Other innovative tools (such as our on-line game "Through the Wild Web Woods") have been designed to address violence in the cyberspace.

Child friendly justice

If children's rights are to be realized then we must ensure that justice systems (both national and international) are accessible, appropriate, friendly and meaningful for children themselves. Over the next year, we shall conclude the drafting of European Guidelines on child-friendly justice embracing in particular the principles of the best interest, non-discrimination and child participation.

Through these measures and those taken by states such as Slovenia in hosting the Ljubljana International Conference on Children's Rights and Protection Against Violence, I believe that the Council of Europe, together with its various partners, is succeeding in its efforts to bring the promotion and protection of children's rights to the top of national and international agendas thereby making a real difference for children. And not only because children are our future, but because they also are the present and like any human being, deserve to enjoy their rights here and now.

Samuel Žbogar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Slovenia and Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe



photo: personal archive

The protection and promotion of children's rights is a universal norm nowadays. This year we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the first international legally binding instrument entirely devoted to protecting and promoting children's rights. The legal formulation of children's rights reflects the gradually changing notion of the child as no longer being "owned by parents"; rather, a child has an individual personality with his/her own rights, while society or the state should ensure the conditions required to exercise children's rights.

Strengthening international norms and standards, and raising awareness of children's rights are of key importance in preventing the abuse and exploitation of children. Within the framework of its foreign policy, Slovenia is engaged in a number of activities, including support for the UN Study on Violence against Children, and efforts to implement its recommendations, as well as the appointment of a special representative of the UN Secretary-General for such matters. We are pleased that these endeavours have finally yielded results this year and that the UN Secretary-General has appointed Marta Santos Pais as Special Representative on Violence against Children. Within the frameworks of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy and External Action and as a member of the UNICEF Executive Board, we advocate such international action that would recognise the close interrelation between security, economic and social development, and human rights.

Special attention is devoted to empowerment of children to exercise their rights. Equally important are education on human rights, children's participation in issues related to their rights and the access of children to international mechanisms for the protection of their rights. In this regard, Slovenia supported the discussion in the UN of a possible complaint mechanism for children.

In 2009, Slovenia is chairing the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, an international organisation for which the protection of human rights is one of the three main objectives. As the chairing country, Slovenia's priorities include children's rights and education on human rights. Each child should be aware of his/her rights, and

therefore Slovenia devotes attention to children's rights in particular within the framework of education on human rights and to the creation of conditions that enable children to become partners when their rights are at stake. To this end, the human rights education project "Our Rights", which was carried out during Slovenia's OSCE Chairmanship in 2005, was renewed. The project, aimed at 50,000 children – the entire generation of children aged from 11 to 12 in Kosovo and North Ossetia (Russian Federation), and children from the three main ethnic groups in Bosnia and Herzegovina – was launched at the beginning of the 2009/2010 school year. It is intended to raise awareness among the general public of children's rights in certain environments and to contribute to systematic education on children's rights in a child-friendly, entertaining and interesting way.

Children's rights will also be addressed within the framework of Slovenia's activities during its Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at the International Conference on Children's Rights and Protection against Violence to be held on 6 and 7 October 2009 in the National Assembly of the Republic of Slovenia. The Conference, organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the National Assembly and the Human Rights Ombudsman of the Republic of Slovenia and under the auspices of President Dr Danilo Türk, will include presentations of numerous Slovenian and international projects and examples of good practice. Its purpose is to raise awareness of children's rights among the political, expert and general publics.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is the most universally ratified convention; nevertheless, twenty years after its adoption, the violation of the rights of children remains widespread. The October conference in Ljubljana on children's rights and protection against violence is an effort to raise awareness of this issue among the Slovenian public and strengthen the position of the Republic of Slovenia in the international arena. I would like to conclude by saying that we should not ignore the fact that children are our future, and that, as adults, we are their role models. This is why we should all take care to invest in future generations, ensuring them their rights and building them a better tomorrow.



BORIS PAHOR CELEBRATES 96 YEARS

Albert Kos, photo: STA

On 26 August the Slovenian writer Boris Pahor, a native of Trieste, celebrated his 96th birthday. To mark the occasion, in Ljubljana a selection of his works was published in several volumes, while Cankarjev Dom hosted a celebration on the day itself, at which Pahor talked in front of a full auditorium with his friend Egon Bavčar and the editor Zdravko Duša about his life, work and his experiences and ideals in life and as a writer. The guest of honour was addressed with congratulations and good wishes by the Minister of Culture, Majda Širca, while the hero of the evening was Pahor himself, whose words prompted several ovations from the audience.

Pahor's long, rich and fruitful life path was marked decisively by his childhood and youth, which he spent in his birthplace of Trieste. It was here after the First World War that he encountered Fascism, which in the years after the war took power in Italy and began the systematic policy of stripping away the national identity of the Slovenians, large numbers of whom under the peace treaty remained cut off from their national homeland in the then Yugoslavia and found themselves – mostly against their will – in the Italian state.

As a Trieste Slovenian, Pahor felt the cruelty of the unbridled settling of scores by the then Italian Fascist authorities with the Slovenians, yet as an unyielding person this reinforced his feeling and consciousness of national affiliation and the human dignity of his compatriots. After studying in Padua, during the Second World War he joined the illegal resistance movement in Trieste and was arrested, in this way spending the last two years of the war in a Nazi concentration camp in Germany. After the war, he spent many years as a teacher of the Slovenian language in Slovenian schools in Trieste, while at the same time working tirelessly

for the rights of the Slovenian minority in Italy, which the new Italian government recognised on paper but in practice frequently and severely limited. His clearest contribution to preserving Slovenian culture in Trieste was the long-time publishing of the literary magazine *Zaliv* [Bay], generally out of his own pocket and only with modest support from others. In this magazine he stood up unstintingly for the ethnic affirmation of the Slovenians, not just those in the minority, but also those in the then Yugoslavia, who did enjoy more rights and autonomy, but whose proper fulfilment of national identity was sidelined under the then Yugoslav communist authorities. It is no surprise then, that Pahor, despite being consistently a socialist by persuasion, got into a dispute with the authorities in his country of ethnicity, which cost him a ban of many years on entering Yugoslavia.

These circumstances of Pahor's life, which gave rise to his worldview and convictions, also left a mark on his literary efforts in the series of novels and tales, and also in his essays, which despite getting into print, for a long time aroused no great attention or recognition in Slovenia, and in fact broke the ice of public recognition more successfully abroad, especially in France. This is true particularly of his novel *Nekropola* [Necropolis], which is a tale of Pahor's bitter and painful camp experience and the indelible traces it left on him. It was this novel, translated into several languages, that attracted great attention and considerable praise from around Europe, and ultimately also in Italy, although not immediately after its publication in 1967, but only in later years, when this book came to be ranked among the most eagerly sought and read.

For Pahor it would therefore be possible to say that in the existing conditions both in Italy and the then Yugoslavia he was 'ahead

of his time', and that his messages, both literary and social, were frequently unheard and poorly and improperly understood. It is probably no coincidence that he was 'discovered' in the full sense only after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when the general social climate in Europe, and with it in Italy and Slovenia, changed and the amenability to issues raised by Pahor grew.

In fact in recent years, acclaim has been heaped upon him from all quarters: some of his books, especially *Nekropola*, have in several countries hit the bestseller and best-read lists, and have caused quite a stir, and two years ago France awarded him its highest state decoration, the Legion d'honneur, while the Italian state broadcasting corporation RAI invited him last year to talk on one of its highest-rating programmes about the hushed-up chapter of Italian history during the period of Fascist terror against the Slovenians, and Ljubljana University proposed him for a Nobel Prize.

Indeed there can be no doubt that Pahor is a man of this world of grand proportions, a man for whom any kind of nationalism is alien, but who is unwavering in his support of the rights of small nations and cultures and of coexistence among nations great and small, since ultimately this is also one of the cornerstones of the emerging Europe, in which each individual, irrespective of his national or other affiliation, would have the possibility of self-fulfilment.

In all this, at his great age Boris Pahor remains hale and youthful, with a lively body and incisive mind, in all respects a man of today and not of yesterday, pulsing with all the events of our times and therefore still a valued and sought-after speaker, who can clarify our views of the past, perceive the present with sensitivity and also project his gaze lucidly into the future.

VILENICA 2009

Albert Kos, photo: STA



In the first few days of September, around 40 poets and writers gathered at Vilenica in the Slovenian Karst for the traditional annual international literary meeting, Vilenica 2009, which is taking place at this location now for the 24th year. The original idea for such a meeting dates back to the time before the fall of the Berlin Wall, when Vilenica enabled central European writers in what was then still the bloc-divided Europe to come face to face and exchange opinions on questions of society and literature, and these very questions, although in changed socio-historical circumstances, became the recurrent theme in all subsequent Vilenica meetings, including this year, at which the framework topic of the international colloquium was 'Who chooses? – Literature and literary agents', with participants discussing the paths of literary works from author to reader and the factors that nowadays influence the choice of reading, where a disproportionately significant influence is being gained by the market, for better or worse. The other main emphasis of this year's Vilenica meeting was on a presentation of Flemish literature as one of the lesser-known national literatures in Europe.

Vilenica, which gave its name to this meeting of writers, is a karstic cave with rich dripstone formations, and the name stems from vila, or fairy, while the cave itself is most famous for being open to tourists for several centuries. The cave chamber deep underground is the setting for each year's final Vilenica event, the awarding of the Vilenica prize, which was received this year by Claudio Magris, a Trieste writer and essayist, recently known and acclaimed more widely around the world for his book *Danube*, translated into 24 languages, including Slovenian. The book evokes the memory of the history and culture of people and landscapes from the source to the outflow of the river, and in this way in fact

represents an affirmation of the Vilenica idea. The award was presented to Magris by Slavko Pregl, president of the Society of Slovenian Writers, which provides the inspiration and organisation behind the Vilenica meetings, while the award ceremony was also attended by the President of Slovenia, Danilo Türk, who highlighted to those present Magris's concise thinking, expressed in his book, which may serve as a starting point for all manner of weighty political and cultural issues of the modern moment.

This year's recipient of the Vilenica crystal for best literary contribution was the Albanian poet Luljeta Lleshanaku, who to date has published several anthologies of poetry, and her work has become a part of major collections of modern Albanian literature.

The programme of this year's Vilenica also spread from its central location to other areas, with a series of literary readings in several locations around Slovenia, with excursions to the locations in the novels of the now late Trieste writer Fulvio Tomizza, the first Vilenica prize recipient, with a visit to Ljubljana and reception with Ljubljana Mayor Zoran Janković and the Slovenian Minister of Culture, Majda Širca, and equally importantly, this year's Vilenica generated attention across the national border in Trieste, where the Revoltella Museum hosted a conversation between Claudio Magris and his fellow Trieste native, the distinguished Slovenian writer of international standing, Boris Pahor, a conversation conducted by the equally distinguished Slovenian writer Drago Jančar.

The pulse of this year's Vilenica thus once again fulfilled its mission: reflecting today's world and its past and future through the prism of literature, whose awareness of people and the world is usually at least a step ahead and stretches fathoms deeper than the awareness possessed by others.





28TH BIENNIAL OF GRAPHIC ARTS IN LJUBLJANA

At the beginning of September in front of the building of the International Centre of Graphic Arts in Tivoli Park, once again a crowd of people gathered to attend the opening of probably the best known fine art event in Slovenia – the Biennial of Graphic Arts in Ljubljana. The event, which on its beginning in 1955 was one of the first to begin successfully breaking down the Iron Curtain between East and West and in the world of fine art established the good reputation of what was called the Ljubljana graphics school, has in its last two incarnations revived the flavour of innovation and breakthrough, which in the last few years of the 1990s had probably faded a little.

The main reason for this fading, however, was not organisational or promotional difficulties in Europe for the well-established biennial, but the uncertain fate of graphics in general, since alongside the classical graphic duplication techniques, in the last two decades there have emerged a great many new techniques that have allowed a different kind of access to art in general. The very awareness of this uncertainty and the acceptance of this fact as a challenge have become the primary recurrent theme of this year's event, with the main exhibition bearing the title *Matrica* [Matrix] – unstable reality. As it was several years ago, the exhibition is

spread around the spaces of the International Centre of Graphic Arts and in the galleries of ŠKUC, Ganes Pratt, Alkatraz, Kapsula and the Jakopič exhibition space, and alongside Biennial director Božidar Zrinski, the creators of the installations are also the curators of these galleries. The entirety that has been thus formulated is therefore a synthesis of views of the best curators regarding the status of graphics today. The winner of this year's prize is the artistic cooperative Justseeds, a decentralised community of artists who have come together to better promote their work, to mutually exchange artistic views and for support. The awarding of the prize to a collective entity has also symbolically indicated the probable path of graphic art in the future, since it seems that the importance of individual artists in this field is being increasingly replaced by a group form of creativity. Naturally: with the increasingly common presence of an artistic approach in architecture or in construction itself as well as in other media, the issue of the "capacity" of artistic production has suddenly become very important.

The Biennial of Graphic Arts is also made up of several other exhibitions and projects. These include the attractive salon of books by artists participating in the Biennial, and

Jože Osterman, photo: artist's archives

the rich collection of other works in this field kept since 2001 now comprises 1,200 books. This year there is a slightly different exhibition of the prize-winner from the previous Biennial, since the 2007 winner Joen Jonho decided not to have a solo exhibition but to also invite seven South Korean artists born in the 1960s to exhibit their work. The exhibition is entitled *After Go-Go* (from the go-go music brought to Korea by American soldiers) – a new period of Korean art, and it is on display in the Cankarjev Dom Gallery. The open-air exhibition *Odtisi* [Impressions], on large hoardings along the promenade leading through Tivoli Park to the International Centre of Graphic Arts, was set up by the Pionirski Dom and comprises children's graphics made in their studios, while in the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum there is an exhibition *Pozdravi iz Striponije* [Greetings from Cartoonia], an international comic-strip project. Artists from abroad have made comic-strip portraits of Slovenia, while Slovenian artists have done the same thing for the homelands of their foreign colleagues; the product is a truly fascinating, unconventional exhibition.

The Biennial of Graphic Arts will be open up until 25 October, and has already attracted a large number of visitors from abroad.



DISCOVERING THE ARTISTIC QUARTER

Jože Osterman, photo: Urška Boljkovac

The Mladi levi [Young Lions] festival, which for several years now has been enhancing the cultural pulse of Ljubljana in August, added to this year's fascinating projects a new socialisation of Slomškova Street, hidden away in a rather sleepy part of the city centre, turning it into an artistic quarter. This was an attempt (organised by Ljubljana's Museum of Modern Art, which in this part of town is acquiring a new exhibition space), of which there have been plenty in Western Europe, at getting the everyday pulse of the street to come alive together with artistic projects and their creators, something that would undoubtedly improve the quality of life in this area. The attempt at least partly succeeded, and the indolent street, which is inhabited mostly by older residents, was of course awakened and enlivened, but just one day of a new image cannot bring lasting change.

The festival did serve up a few other interesting projects, for instance the Austrian-French project by the group Superamas entitled *Empire*, and 11 other theatrical performances and one concert (performed by the group Kombinat, which cultivates songs of resistance and revolution), while the subject matter touched on the hardships of individuals who are now struggling increasingly with one of the deepest social and economic crises. In this context several artistic and other workshops were organised to help visitors gain some new knowledge or satisfy some special interests – for instance a DJ workshop, a workshop for printing T-shirts and similar. The festival's organiser, the Bunker institute, sensitively identified the major problems of the current times, and also attempted to offer answers to them.



KINO ŠIŠKA REOPENS ITS DOORS

Andrej Savelli, photo: Barbara Jakše



After an absence of eight years, Kino Šiška (Šiška Cinema) has once again opened its doors to the public, this time as the 'Center Urbane Kulture Kino Šiška', or Šiška Cinema Centre of Urban Culture. It aims to become the leading centre for contemporary and urban creativity in Ljubljana, and indeed Slovenia. The new Kino Šiška will focus on concert, theatre, dance and experimental events, and will also be able to offer production facilities. The programme will present and bring together multicultural urban life, political freedom and technological progress, providing a boost to innovation and creativity with a marked international dimension. The Centre is home to a large and small performance hall, an exhibition space and two cafes. Kino Šiška was designed by architect Božidar Gvardijančič and built in 1962, with the renovation overseen by architects Anja Planišček and Nena Ga-

brovec. The large oval-shaped hall, which has been dubbed 'the cathedral' and which once buzzed to the sound of the film projector, has space for 800 standing or 450 seated. The Centre's manager, Simon Kardum, is promising three or four events a week, with around 100 events in the small hall and the same number in the Cathedral every year. Since the cultural productions on offer are intended for a specific, primarily younger, audience, the Centre will attempt to make events as price-accessible as possible. Although the official opening was not until 18 September with an appearance by the groups Laibach and Juno Reactor, the stage has already been christened, with a concert by the legendary punk band, Pankrti, which took place on 28 August. For more on Kino Šiška and its programme, visit the website: www.kinosiska.si

CANKARJEV DOM STARTS THE NEW SEASON

Polona Prešeren

According to Mitja Rotovnik, director of Cankarjev Dom arts and cultural centre, who was speaking at the presentation of the new season, the recession has not touched the institution at all. This is a reflection of good work and the rich and varied programme of events on offer, and also the result of the various anniversaries being celebrated this year and next. The 50th Ljubljana Jazz Festival, Europe's oldest, took place in Cankarjev Dom this year, while November will see the annual LIFFe film festival, which this year celebrates its 20th birthday. With more than 45,000 visitors, it is one of the most keenly awaited cultural events of the autumn part of the season. This will be followed by the 25th Slovenian Book Fair, which this year will provide a festive overture to the World Book Capital events to take place in Ljubljana in April 2010.

The new year will see yet another jubilee, when Cankarjev Dom celebrates 30 years as Slovenia's central cultural institution. The number of attendances at performances and exhibitions over these 30 years has already topped the 10 million mark, which shows how much the public regards it as its own. And the rich variety of the cultural programme is more than evident from the fact that the last three decades have seen some 30,000 cultural, conference and social events take place at Cankarjev Dom. As Rotovnik says, without Cankarjev Dom 'our capital would, particularly in the performance arts and the area of conferences, and despite the considerable amount of effort invested in the city's cultural image, be a lonely provincial island in the middle of an increasingly well-developed narrower and wider region.' Cankarjev Dom is known for its superb cultural events; this season will be no exception. Among the highlights will be an appearance by the Vienna Philharmonic, conducted by the great Riccardo Muti, an encounter with Armenia as part of a festival celebrating less well-known cultures, and a wide range of conferences attended by scientists, professors and other representatives of various professions.

A FANTASTIC CLIMAX TO LJUBLJANA FESTIVAL 2009

Polona Prešeren

The organisers saved two wonderful events to mark the final week of the Ljubljana summer festival. Hearts were first warmed by the London Symphony Orchestra and then set aflame by the Bolshoi Theatre's production of Tchaikovsky's opera Eugene Onegin. The performance by the London Symphony Orchestra was without doubt one of the highlights of this year's festival. The first part of the concert was devoted to Debussy's series of symphonic sketches and impressions, La Mer. This was followed later by Shostakovich's brooding Symphony No. 8 in C Minor (Opus 65). The orchestra was conducted movingly by Valery Gergiev. In the final week of the festival there were four sold-out performances by the mighty Bolshoi Theatre from Russia. Tchaikovsky's opera Eugene Onegin was presented in a new, one could say rather controversial production directed by Dmitri Tcherniakov, and one that has caught the imagination of a number of internationally known opera experts. All four performances were marked by superb soloists and rich scene design, each one earning the coveted standing ovation at the end. The curtain then came down on the festival until next year. This summer the 13 festival stages played host to more than 2,500 performers from 23 countries, with the 73 superb events being watched by over 70,000 people.



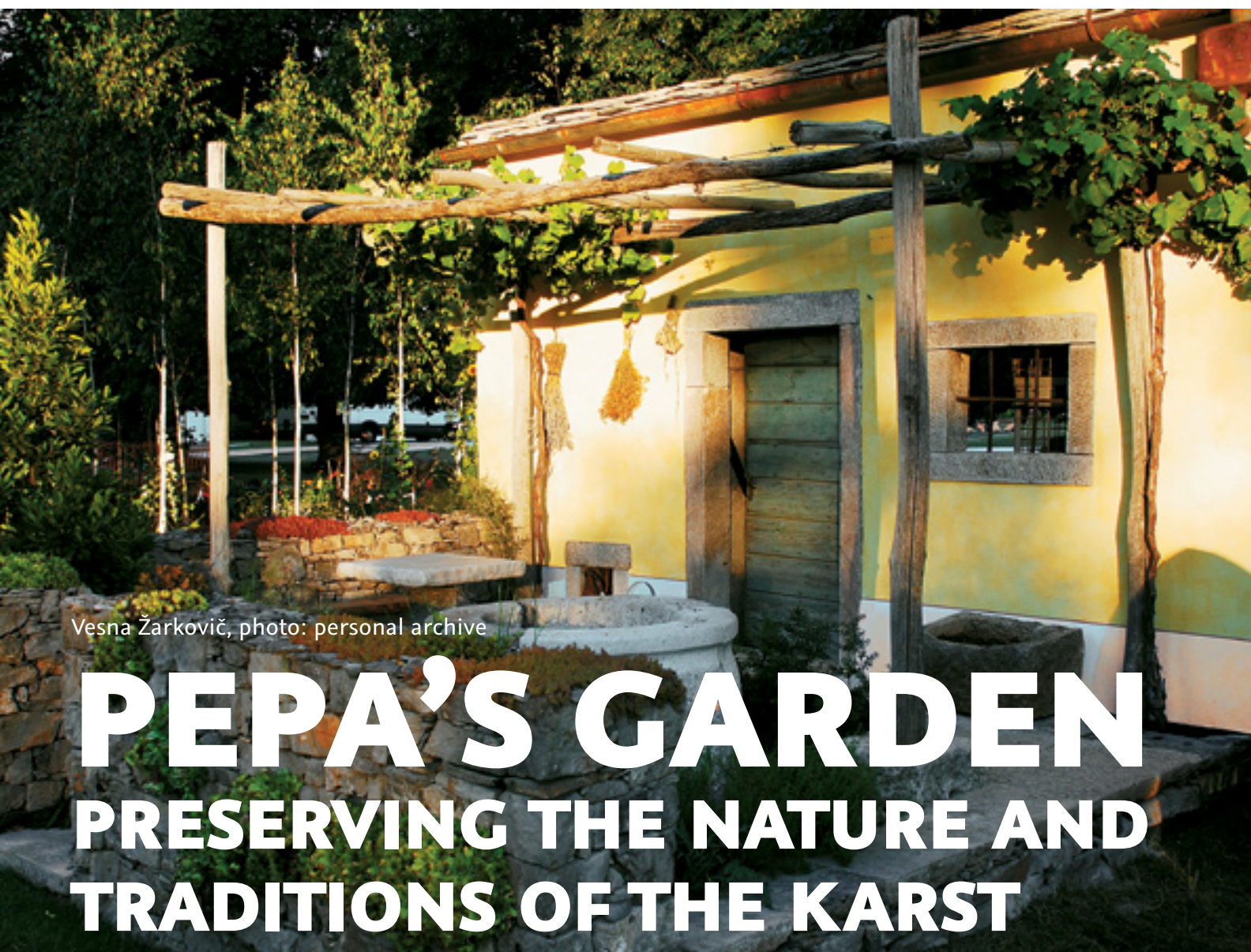
KINO OTOK RETURNS TO DELIGHT IZOLA

Andrej Savelli, photo: STA

The Kino Otok international film festival returned to the coastal town of Izola on 10 September. This was the 5th time the event had been organised, following a break last year. The main theme of this year's festival, which took place between 10 and 14 September, was Latin American cinema, with a strong emphasis on those films that use the latest cinematographic techniques, although around 40 films from all corners of the globe were shown in the various festival sections. Five films applied for the competition section, 'Trgatev' (Harvest). First prize, which ensures that the film is purchased and distributed in cinemas around Slovenia, went to 'Prince of Broadway' by American director Sean Baker. 'Dokufokus' (Document-Focus), for documentary films with socially engaged themes, was a new addition to the festival; other sections included 'Prijetelji'

(Friends), 'Odpri otok' (Open Island), 'Video na plaži' (Video on the Beach), 'Otoška Animatoka' (Island Animatoka) and 'Silvanova kino šola' (Silvan Cinema School). A number of the best films from the festival were shown at the Kinodvor arts cinema in Ljubljana between 12 and 17 September. The Kino Otok festival is always keen to show the kind of film productions that are otherwise not available for viewing in Slovenian cinemas. The festival also offered numerous chances to chat to festival guests and filmmakers, an interactive workshop for young filmmakers, and a children's film showing. A film festival of this international scope, which offers so much to the town of Izola itself as well as to the Slovenian cinema-going public, could not have been possible without the help of a great many volunteers and film enthusiasts.

OUR EXCELLENCE



Vesna Žarkovič, photo: personal archive

PEPA'S GARDEN PRESERVING THE NATURE AND TRADITIONS OF THE KARST

'I decided to do the Pepa's Garden project a year ago – specifically, after visiting the world-famous Chelsea Flower Show in London. I began planning it in July last year. It took me just over three months to plan and to collect all the necessary materials. I scoured the whole of the Karst to find and reach agreement on borrowing the right components, of the proper quality and appropriate size. I transferred the plan for my image of a fenced Karst courtyard – a borjač in the local dialect and one I dubbed 'Pepa's Karst garden', representing the 'front garden' of a village home – from my head to the computer and then onto paper. Into the folder, in addition to the plan, I placed a description

of the garden, a list of the plants and a planting plan. Last October I sent the folder to London and applied to take part in the UK's longest-running horticultural event,' says agronomist Borut Benedejčič. The result? At the Hampton Court Palace Flower Show, Europe's largest and organised by the Royal Horticultural Society, which was attended by around 170,000 visitors over six days, his garden was awarded a gold medal. Pepa's Garden told its own special story – the story of the Karst and its people. It so convinced the judges that they gave it the two highest awards in the 'small garden' category – the gold medal and a special award for the best small garden.

Borut graduated in agronomic engineering and manages a landscape gardening company, Hortikultura, in Sežana. His right hand, Tanja, is manager of the youth hostel in Pliskovica in the Karst. Borut gained his initial experience over the border, helping to landscape gardens in the Italian Karst. Wishing to learn more, he and Tanja moved for two months to England – he worked in a nursery while she got familiarised herself with youth organisations. Borut later joined the landscape gardening company which he now manages. Despite the fact that he is the manager, he spends most of his time in his familiar green overalls, up to his neck in earth or sand, or among the plants.

For him, the Karst means unspoilt nature

Because he grew up in a village, surrounded by fields, meadows and common land, Borut knows plants and animals well. For him, the Karst means unspoilt nature. He is convinced that the Karst plateau is so valuable that it should be protected officially as a landscape park. Life in the Karst, the capacity to observe as well as the opportunity for education enhanced by experience, are the foundations on which he built Pepa's Karst garden.

'I planned this garden from the starting point of defining every square decimetre of area as a useable outside living environment. Into it I brought distinctive Karst elements, researched Karst architecture to the last detail, and planted those plants that were traditional and wild – those that are resistant to the climatic conditions of the Karst, i.e. to drought. Many people don't like these plants, and to many they seem too small, they don't blossom enough. I built the various colours of these plants into the Karst architecture, so that the whole looks beautiful, in harmony, textured and structurally correct. They say that the key to progress is the ability to take a step back. I took this approach because I know that people are already fed up of concrete, plastic and new materials. This garden is for relaxation, for enjoyment among plants that we can use.' This is how Borut explains the thinking behind the project.

In order to increase the value of the garden, he introduced into that natural asset most prized in the Karst (because so scarce): water. He erected a Karst well with a visible section above ground called a šap. Into the old, plain stone rim was woven the steel chain that was used for at least 200 years to draw the bucket up from the depths. Before his departure for England, Borut restored it to its original splendour. The water flows from the roof, which is covered with special stone plates, or skrli, into a rusty gutter, which leads it underground into the well. Until the arrival of a public water supply system in the villages of the Karst a few decades ago,

the water from the well was for everyone and everything – people, animals and plants in the garden.

So many elements were collected for Pepa's garden that, at the end of July, a lorry left Sežana for London carrying a 46-ton load in two large containers. Borut sat next to the driver and looked after the plants that were travelling in a cooling chamber. After three days' driving they unloaded at their destination and began to assemble the stone elements and decorate them with the plants.

The Karst as a landscape park

'The Karst should be protected as a landscape park. Tanja and I have the ambition of establishing a trademark which would bring together all those people striving for the protection and development of the Karst – the kind of 'movement' that is common in places in Western Europe. In the Karst, which is a small and sensitive area of little interest to commerce or agriculture, containing as it does poor soil and little water, only those things that can really thrive there must be cultivated: indigenous, traditional varieties of vine and plant that are justified from

a professional point of view and adapted to the climate conditions. Herbs and aromatic plants can be a useful supplement to other agricultural activities. At very good locations, wheat and buckwheat can perhaps be grown.

'Our purpose is to revitalise the common land of the Karst – to clear overgrown common land, where overgrowth has supplanted the growth of Karst winter savory, which is an important plant for the region. Even 20 years ago, all areas of common land in the Karst were mown, livestock grazed on them and the walls and paths were maintained. When it no longer paid to produce meat and milk, the rearing of cows and sheep was abandoned; there is no longer any grazing or any mowing. Everything is now overgrown. Paths are disappearing, but they could be used for tourism purposes. The Karst should find a place to belong.'

He is interested in the marketing of wine and the protection of certain areas. He is convinced only indigenous varieties should be grown in the Karst – teran and, at most, common grape wine.

And why such effort? Neither the gold medal nor the special award were accompanied by a cash prize. Well, the effort was Borut's honour and fame, but more so that the Karst could find a place where it belonged.



OUR EXCELLENCE

Mateja Malnar Štembal, photo: Andrej Mück

IGOR RAVBAR AND HIS MASTERPIECES IN WOOD



Anyone who knows Ljubljana knows that, although it is indeed a capital city, it's not so big that gossip doesn't fly to all corners with lightning speed. Of course, this is all the better if what goes around is the story of a good reputation. Slovenians know better than most the proverb that says: 'Dober glas seže v deveto vas', or a good reputation travels far.

And so, a few years ago, word went round town that there was a wooden bicycle tied up outside the National Museum of Slovenia with a strong steel chain. It was, to all intents and purposes, a proper bike, with two wheels, handlebars, a saddle, pedals, lights and a small leather panier – and on the rear mudguard, the modest inscription 'Ravbar'.

On the internet, enthusiasts sighed that the bike had such a warm and natural feeling to it – that it literally radiated all the love, skill and time that had gone into making it. People began to try and guess who was responsible, why it was there. Perhaps it was a museum exhibit, or maybe it really was meant to be ridden like any other bike. Soon enough, there were people who let it be known that they'd seen the bike in motion – with a real cyclist in the saddle and all.

He was Igor Ravbar, 'father' of the wooden bicycle and a host of other masterpieces in wood. Igor is employed as a metal restorer

at the National Museum; in his spare time, however, he likes to become a master craftsman able to breathe new life into the simplest wooden object, to make it useful and give it a simultaneously timeless and historic feel.

Woodworking has a very long tradition in Slovenia, which is why it sometimes seems to us that wood can no longer give us anything we haven't seen before. However, thanks to Igor and other woodworking fans, wood is making a big comeback in the world of Slovenian design and architecture.

Igor has been working with wood as a hobby since 1985, although he does occasionally come across it in office hours as well. In 2006, along with colleagues from the National Museum, he decided to make a replica of a drevak, the wooden canoe-like vessel made from a single tree trunk that used to sail up and down the Ljubljanica river from pre-historic times right up to the beginning of the 20th century.

Igor's work in wood, which has mostly been created in his amateur carpentry workshop, includes three wooden bikes, a canoe, three kayaks, walking sticks and quite a number of useful and usable household items – chairs, armchairs, tables and the like.

The wooden bike he made in 2002 goes by the very sonorous name of 'Woo'; the two that followed could not, of course, have been named that much differently. So we have 'Woo 2', a woman's city bike for his wife Barbara, with a lovely little basket, and 'Woo 3' (which features a saddle with a backrest).

For many, a wooden bicycle is today something of a curiosity; but it should not be forgotten that the very first vehicles to feature two wheels placed one after the other were made of wood, and even a hundred years ago, bicycle frames were not made of metal pipes but wooden sticks.

When Igor was thinking about his new bike seven years ago, he imagined that the frame and perhaps one or two other parts would be made of wood, with only a few steel components to strengthen the construction. The frame of the bike is therefore made from laminated slats of spruce in beech plywood, with the fine details being done entirely by hand. There's one more interesting feature – the saddle is made of walnut and does not require upholstery because it is well sprung,

What do you say to that?

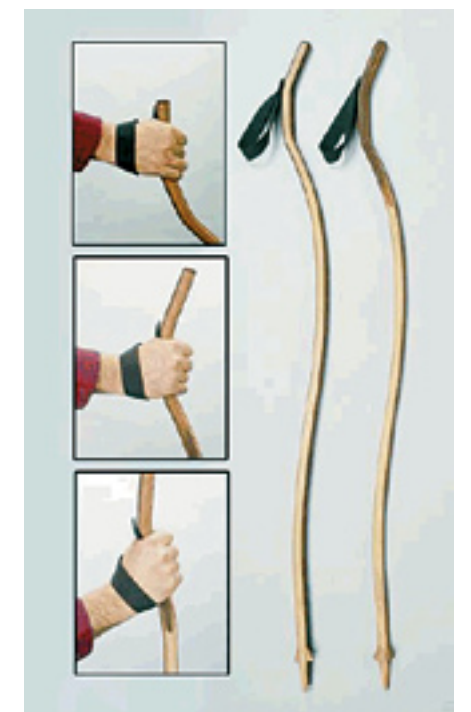
Igor's love for wood design and the breathing of practical life into wood products also helped in his construction of the modular wooden kayak, which he made according to his own plans. He first made a three-metre-modular boat for a child – specifically, his daughter, Eva – later producing a longer, 5.2-metre version that divides in the middle.

As said, he decided to produce his own plans, but took the Greenland kayak as his model. He did it the way they did in the old carpentry schools, first producing a plaster model and then producing the ribs, attaching spruce slats to it. Thus his third kayak was born, the longest so far at six metres.

He found that wood was not only beautiful but that no artificial material could begin to replace it. Because he made it himself, the feeling he got from working the wood stayed on his fingers. It is no wonder that a number of professionals have said that a wooden kayak or canoe has a soul.

The fruits of his hobby are beginning to attract a great response from those that work and design wood for a living. At last year's 21st Biennial of Industrial Design (BIO 21), one of the oldest international design events, his wooden walking sticks were awarded a 'good design' award.

The international jury said that the sticks were a unique product that combined the historical references of the material with an emphasis on the natural beauty of that material in a modern and ergonomic way. To receive an award like that from the design profession was, of course, a great honour, and one that Igor Ravbar first and foremost took as recognition for a job well done. He won't be running out of imaginative ideas and solutions any time soon, with new ones taking shape in his head every day. And so we wait, prepared for wonder and surprise.



Polona Prešeren, photo: Tomo Jeseničnik

CUISINE OF GORENJSKA

THE TASTE OF THE ALPINE DAIRY



Since the Alpine dairy season is coming to an end, we have decided to go to Gorenjska this month for a spot of culinary pampering. This part of Slovenia, which stretches northwest

from the capital of Ljubljana, is primarily Alpine in character. In the past, its natural features did indeed have a significant impact on its way of life, and therefore on its cuisine.

Buckwheat and corn porridge (žganci), minced lard (zaseka) with garlic, sausages and homemade bread, game, dumplings (štruklji) of various sorts, Bohinj cottage cheese (mohant), loška smojka (boiled and roasted small turnips), special Gorenjska salami (želodec), Bled's famous cream cakes ... There's nothing you can't find in Gorenjska's range of culinary delights. The variety of cuisine in Gorenjska reflects the variety of the cuisine of the country as a whole. Ethnologist Professor Janez Bogataj believes that Slovenian cuisine is among the richest and most interesting in Europe. And in Gorenjska, it is especially rich and interesting. Here is where the authentic Slovenian inn finds its place, its essence, and some of them have been around for a very long time indeed. Let there be no misunderstanding here: although we are talking about tradition, the dishes on offer in the inns and restaurants have been redesigned into top-quality modern cuisine using the very best ingredients.

It was in one of these authentic Slovenian inns, which served coachmen travelling between Vienna and Trieste, that a very special story began to be written: the story of the Carniolan sausage. A great deal has already been written about this sausage, but nevertheless there is one story we should mention that explains why this sausage is so special. As the anecdote tells us, Emperor Franz Joseph adored this sausage. He stopped at the Marinšek coaching inn in Naklo on the way from Vienna to Trieste. All the innkeeper had in stock was the normal 'house sausage'. The Emperor loved it so much that he exclaimed: 'This is no normal sausage, this is a Carniolan sausage!' The Carniolan sausage is a protected food today, and the owners of Gorenjska inns and restaurants are working tirelessly for the protection of other well-known and typical dishes from the region, including Gorenjska smoked lard and Gorenjska želodec salami with porridge. In the proper inns of Gorenjska, they always try to include in their menus dishes made from authentic high-quality ingredients from the local area. One of the most important features of high-quality dishes is the traceability of the ingredients used. In Gorenjska the range of cuisine on offer sits alongside the tourist menus characteristic of Gorenjska as an Alpine destination.

A feast in the mountains

Alpine dairy pastures are the reason why a trip to Gorenjska is not complete until you try authentic Alpine soured milk or cheese. Gorenjska is the most Alpine region of Slovenia and from very early times, cow's and sheep's milk, and products made from them, have dominated the cuisine of these parts. Real food from the meadows is robust, since the shepherds that took the animals to pasture needed strength to last the day. Of course, in addition to dairy products, one could find on Gorenjskan menus mutton and lamb dishes, but much more often in the past than today.

Cheese is characteristic of the area around Bohinj; particularly worthy of mention is the spicy Bohinj cottage cheese mohant, which is a protected dish and a proper coachman's speciality, suitable for accompanying boiled potatoes, as a spread or a dish on its own. The people of Bohinj are masters at making other mature cheeses. Their smoked minced lard is also exceptional, suitable as a spread on bread or an accompaniment to Bohinj porridge made from reddish-brown corn. Žganci, or porridge, made from corn or buckwheat, sometimes with the addition of potatoes and wheat, is probably the most widespread dish in Slovenia. It is garnished with minced lard, crackling, grapeskins or eggs (to make jurjeva kapa, or 'George's Hat' – a kind of omelette).

Many Slovenian mountain or dairy huts are a pleasant meeting-point for lovers of nature and of simple but extremely tasty food. Certainly, curdled milk with a bowl of buckwheat porridge tastes a lot better high above sea level, when you're pleasantly tired after a hard day's hiking, than down in the valley. And you'll always find an interesting stew on the menu, anything from jota to ričet (the former made with cabbage or turnip, the latter with barley), or else a proper Alpine masovnik. Being city girls, the masovnik opened up whole new horizons for us. This was at one time food for real Alpine dairy-men; today it is only for the hardest and most committed mountaineers. This is robust floury food where it's best if you don't count the calories. Masovnik is made from buckwheat or corn flour boiled down in hot cream. In some places eggs are added. Without question, this is real food for strength. One can still find enthusiasts that prepare the food in the traditional way. At the 'Pri

Ingotu' cabin on the meadow at Jasenje, in the glorious embrace of the Špik mountain group, they offer proper homemade juices, herbal teas, and stews prepared in a cauldron over an open fire. They only and always offer what can be found in the countryside around.

Specialities of Gorenjska

In the Upper Sava Valley, where the last word, at least in winter, goes to skiing and cross-country skiing, one can tuck into wonderful Rateče, Podkoren or kocovi (pear-filled) krapi after a hard day on the white slopes – these are 'pockets' of pastry with a filling of polenta and cottage cheese or dried fruit. And of course, some buckwheat porridge meal with porcini or other mushrooms.

If you visit Bled at any time, you simply must try this town's main culinary speciality – the Bled kremšnita or cream slice, which is prepared in this tourist centre using the original recipe from the years after the Second World War. This simple dessert, made from vanilla cream and whipped cream between two thin layers of puff pastry, is a speciality of the gastronomy and tourism of Bled. In the Park Hotel in Bled, they still make it according to the original recipe from the beginning of the 20th century. They use original natural ingredients that contain no additives or substitutes.

Among the other specialities of Gorenjska are govnač, or boiled and garnished sweet cabbage with potatoes, which makes an excellent dish on its own or as a side dish for meat. On Velika Planina above Kamnik, they prepare small round or pear-shaped and decorated cheeses. Mavžlji or maželjni are meatballs wrapped in a netting made of pork and roasted in the oven and served with pickled turnip or cabbage. During the winter months, they offer meat and liver sausages (fried sausages and black pudding), godla (a black pudding soup), loaves filled with smoked meat, and bread called Gorenjska prata or budl.

Gorenjska is also the cradle of Slovenian and European beekeeping. Of the desserts, we cannot overlook the rolled cakes and dumplings, potice and štruklji, for which Gorenjska's housewives and restaurants are famed. On top of everything, we should add the various types of fruit schnapps, some with added health-giving herbs which grow on the hills and mountains.

slovenian delights

Ajdovi žganci (buckwheat porridge)

Ingredients:

0.5 l (17 fl oz) buckwheat flour
3 tbs coarse wheat flour
1.5 l (50 2/3 fl oz) salted boiling water
crackling to garnish

Mix both flours and pour the mixture into salted boiling water. Boil for a few minutes until the flour is submerged in water. Then, using the handle of a wooden spoon, make a hole in the middle and boil on a low heat for another 20 minutes. When cooked, pour away some of the water and stir well.

Add the crackling, cover the pot and let it rest for 15 minutes. Using two forks, crumble the žganci into a bowl and garnish with crackling.

Žganci are best served with sauerkraut, pickled turnips, milk or curdled milk.

Ajdova kaša z gobami (buckwheat porridge with mushrooms)

1 kg of buckwheat porridge
500 g of fresh mushrooms
80 g of fat
1 chopped onion
salt
parsley
pepper
sour cream

Cook and season the buckwheat porridge.

Fry the onion and the finely sliced mushrooms in the fat.

At the end of the frying, add chopped parsley and the cooked and drained porridge. Season with pepper and garnish with sour cream.

Govnač

1 kg of fresh cabbage
500 g–1 kg of potatoes
minced lard or crackling
1 onion cut into quarters
a few cloves of garlic
salt
pepper
caraway seeds
bay leaves

Cut the fresh cabbage leaves into strips, cover with a little water and boil. Drain the cabbage, add a little fresh water and cook slowly.

In the meantime, peel the potatoes, dice them and add them to the cabbage. Use more potatoes if you want a thicker dish. Add onion and a few cloves of garlic. Add salt, flavour with caraway, add a bay leaf and cook for one hour.

Mash and, if necessary, thicken with flour and water. Garnish with crackling.

Rateški krapci (Rateče pastries)

For the pastry:

6 boiled potatoes
2 eggs
500g of wheat flour
salt

For the filling:

300 g of cooked and ground dried pears
1–2 spoonfuls of corn meal or white breadcrumbs
honey to taste
cinnamon

For the garnish:

2–3 spoonfuls of fat
breadcrumbs
Make the pastry, roll it out and, using a mould, cut rounds of 8–10 cm in diameter. Place the filling in the centre of each round using a teaspoon.
Fold the pastry rounds over into semicircles, using your fingers to seal the edges.
Cook the fritters in salted boiling water until they rise to the surface.
Use tongs to remove them from the water, place them in a dish and garnish with breadcrumbs fried in butter.

SPORTS

Ana Mrzlikar, photo: STA

Primož Kozmus KING OF THE HAMMER



From when he was a little boy, he wanted to become a top sportsman. Before he'd reached the age of 30, he had his wish. After he won Olympic gold at the Beijing Games last year, the highest achievement for any athlete, he proved that he was still king of the hammer by taking gold at this year's World Athletics Championships in Berlin.

Kozmus says that his friends would describe him as phlegmatic. His life's motto is 'to the end and beyond'. Is it this combination that is, perhaps, the key to his success? That enables him to enter the circle in a relaxed frame of mind, concentrate that mind and throw the hammer as far as it can go? Maybe. But his success is the fruit of many years of training. Starting at the age of 15, his training sessions must now number in the thousands. He spends a great deal of his time when training at the Croatian Olympic centre in Bjelolasica. He has 11 training sessions a week and around 300 a year – which means he throws the hammer around 10,000 times a year. If one were to count the total distance his hammer travels each year, it would measure over 600

kilometres. The hammer itself weighs 7.26 kg. And given that Primož lifts an average of between five and 11 tons of weight per daily training session, this means that he has lifted way in excess of 100,000 tons in the course of his career.

2007 – the breakthrough year

In 2003 Primož Kozmus was named second best sportsman in Slovenia; that same year, and the year after, he was named the country's best athlete. He won these titles on the basis of two outstanding results: in 2003 he became the new national record-holder with a throw of 81.21 metres, and came fifth in the World Championships in Paris. At the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, his sixth place made him the most successful Slovenian hammer-thrower in history. But although this was indeed the best achievement by a Slovenian hammer-thrower at the Olympic Games up to that point, Primož was still not satisfied. He knew he had it in him to go further ... When he raised the national record in 2007 to 82.30 metres and won his first major championship medal, a silver, at the World Championships in Osaka, he had achieved the breakthrough he needed. It was this medal that brought him the prestigious title of Slovenian sportsman of the year.

Ever onwards, ever upwards ...

The greatest achievement of his career so far came in 2008. He strung together a long series of victories at competitions at home and abroad. Competitively, the season began extremely well; fitness-wise, things were not as they should have been. He was plagued by injury, which meant that he was forced to change his planned winter and summer programme of preparations. His appearance at the upcoming Beijing Olympic Games was hanging in the balance. However, on 14 July, after test training at his local Brežice stadium, he confirmed that he would be appearing in Beijing. At that time he was probably unaware that his career would become a golden one barely a month later when, on 17 August, he became the Olympic hammer champion. Around 300 people, including three coachloads of fans, turned out at Brnik airport to greet him upon his return from Beijing.

'He came, he threw, he conquered'

His fans gave this slogan to Primož, who had returned as world champion from Berlin, at a reception in Brežice, and it has now become his trademark. On 17 August, at the World Athletics

Championships in Berlin, Primož Kozmus confirmed that he is the best hammer-thrower in the world. He was the only competitor to throw the hammer over the 80-metre line – and he did it three times.

His throw of 80.84 metres took him above the Pole, Szymon Ziolkowski, Olympic champion at the 2000 Games in Sydney and 2001 world champion in Edmonton, who threw 79.30 metres. Kozmus's gold medal was Slovenia's first at a World Athletics Championships. He joined Slovenia's other World Championship medal winner, Gregor Cankar, who won a bronze in the long jump in Seville in 1999. As mentioned earlier, of course, Primož himself won a silver in the World Championships in Osaka in 2007. On that occasion, he missed the gold by a fraction, being beaten in the last throw by the Belarusian Ivan Tihon, who was found to have used banned substances a year later at the Beijing Games. New national record and the longest throw in the world this season: 82.58 m. After becoming world champion, Primož's first domestic appearance was at a competition in Celje. The meet, which was part of the Athletics Grand Prix series, featured quite a few big names in world athletics, in addition to Primož of course. And it

was at this competition, on 2 September, that Primož set a new national record. His throw, which was the longest in the world this season, was measured at 82.58 metres and was watched by a packed house at the Celje stadium.

No nonsense

Primož Kozmus is known as an athlete who speaks his mind. His belief that being a 'top sportsman' is a profession rather than an amateur hobby has marked him out as one of the few top competitors in Slovenia prepared to fight to improve conditions in Slovenian sport and to stand up openly in favour of proper regulation of their status. He believes it unacceptable that top sportsmen and women that have achieved outstanding success at major championships, thus presenting Slovenia to the rest of the world in the best possible way, should have to struggle when their career comes to an end. He therefore proposed a system of pensions for top athletes that win medals at the Olympic Games. Primož is as sure about this as he is sure of himself when he enters the circle, saying that he will not stop until things have changed for the better. He will continue to draw attention to the problems and propose solutions within sport, politics and the business world.

Kozmus knows from first hand that the enthusiasm and talent shown by young athletes are often not enough on their own and that companies are not investing enough in sport. He is therefore determined to do as much as possible himself to rectify this and give his support to future top sportsmen and women. This year, at the World Championships in Berlin, they printed T-shirts with the words 'Primož Kozmus, Berlin', with proceeds going to support young talented sportsmen and women. By doing so, Primož showed his unique form of support for the top sportsmen and women who will, in the future, reach the summit of sporting achievement nationally and internationally.

Primož is a sportsman whose fame has not gone to his head. He loves giving autographs and exchanging a few words with his admirers. He is also one of the rare sportsmen (perhaps even the only one) who dares to predict victory, which he did before the World Championships in Berlin.

Next goal: a world record?

Has the time finally come for the world record, which has stood for more than two decades, to be broken? This is, of course, the mark set by the Russian Jurij Sedik way back in 1986, when he threw 86.74 metres. Primož's trainer Kevot is convinced he is capable of throwing the hammer further than any man in history. And Primož's publicly stated wish is to do this by the end of the Olympic Games in London in 2012. His preparations are already underway, but he is convinced he can improve them still further. He says he still has quite a bit left in the tank. Fingers crossed!

Go, Primož, go!

Or: Throw, Primož, throw!

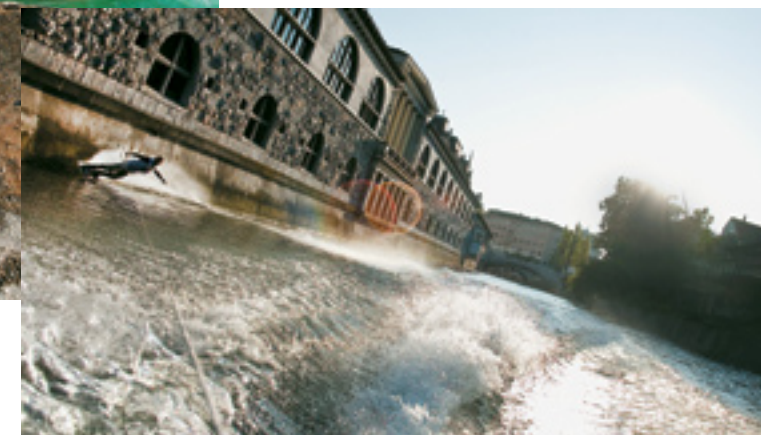
17 August – a special date in the calendar

One could say that 17 August is rather special for Primož Kozmus, being the date on which he achieved his two greatest triumphs. On 17 August last year he mounted the podium to receive his gold medal at the Beijing Olympics. Exactly one year later, at 8.49 pm to be precise, the Slovenian national anthem once again rang out, this time at the Olympic Stadium in Berlin. This time Primož added the title of world champion to that of Olympic champion, confirming that he is, indeed, king of the hammer.

SPORTS

Jana Bogataj, photo: Simon Pukl

NEW SPORT INVENTED IN SLOVENIA



Take one whitewater slalom course, a winch and thirteen daring extreme athletes rushing upstream on a wakeboard through the rapids and you get what is currently one of the most spectacular sports events in the world – the Red Bull Upstream. After last year's successful premiere, around 1,500 spectators gathered on 12 September 2009 in a small place called Tacen to look on with interest and excitement at this new sports craze from Slovenia: whitewater wakeboarding.

It was boredom which made surfers come up with the idea of being pulled through the water by a motorboat while they were waiting for the perfect wave. In the early 1990s, this way of passing time became a sport in its own right called "wakeboarding". This involves athletes being pulled by a motorboat or a cable on a snowboard-like board on calm coastal waters or lakes while they tackle various obstacles or make spectacular jumps. Around twenty years later it was tedium which led a small group of Slovenian and Croatian wakeboarders to look for new challenges. They struck gold in Tacen, a small place on the outskirts of Ljubljana which fans of canoeing will be

familiar with. The stretch of the Sava River around Tacen has a multitude of rapids and eddies whose power canoeists have had to pit their strengths against since 1939 in national as well as international competitions. So why not also make use of this water power for wakeboarding?

In September 2008, Tacen gained a new watersports attraction, as thanks to the main sponsor Red Bull a hitherto unique wakeboard contest was held. In the Red Bull Upstream, board-riders were for the first time ever not pulled through still water but against the strong current of white water. Rapids and eddies became natural obstacles and rocks became natural slides. In order to make this extreme sport even more fascinating, three artificial elements were installed as jumping aids. At a speed of 30 km/h the participants had to incorporate as many tricks and technical difficulties into their run as they could. The jury chose the winner based on criteria of style, creativity, a high level of difficulty in the tricks performed, entertainment value and as daring a ride as possible. It is clear from the start list, made up exclusively of world, European and national champions, that not just any wakeboarder, no matter how fearless they may be, is up to the high standards demanded by whitewater conditions.

This year, 13 participants from Slovenia, Germany, Hungary, Austria and the US tackled the challenge of Tacen, which even the most experienced boarders described as

the greatest they had experienced in their lives. But, in the end, ambition won out over fear: not even the most painful tumbles in the ice-cold water, which made the 1,500 spectators gasp, could dampen the competitive spirit and readiness to take the risks attempted by the starters. After two qualifying rounds, the best seven were allowed to test their limits still further and prove their ability in three final runs. There was more than enough entertainment for the mainly young spectators who turned out by the Sava on this sunny autumn afternoon.

It was no easy task for the three judges from Slovenia, Germany and Austria to pick those finalists who had combined their creativity in overcoming the obstacles with bravery in style, tricks and line taken in the water. The best and technically most demanding performance was put on by the American Adam Errington, followed by Balázs Bakro from Hungary and J. D. Webb, also from the US. The crowd's favourite and local matador, Robert Pokovec, came in fourth, as he did the year before. However, the homeland of whitewater wakeboarding nevertheless racked up its first trophy this year: for her incredible courage for being the first woman to tackle the canoe run on a wakeboard, Naja Puhar from Slovenia won a special prize. In his victory speech, Errington praised the crazy idea and good organisation of the event. Like everyone present, he too hopes that next year he will have a chance to defend his title.

Nataša Benčič /Radio Koper/, photo: Mateja J Potočnik

OFF PLAY ON!

MAJA KOJC, oboe soloist, teacher, soul of the international oboe and bassoon festival – OFF IZOLA

For the fifth year running now, the second half of the month of August in Izola, a town by the sea in Slovenian Istria, has been the time when at every step you encounter young musicians with instruments in their hands, all dressed in the same recognisable T shirt, arriving here from all over Europe for the international oboe and bassoon festival, the short OFF festival. Each year more than 40 young musicians – and in five years around 150 – gather together at this biggest event for oboe and bassoon, truly the only event of its kind in Europe. They play several concerts for Izola, which is a treat both for the local people and tourists. They bring to the town a positive energy and a special kind of “OFF spirit”, which is infectious and also now indispensable. The story of OFF is inseparably tied to Maja Kojc. Maja is a musician. An oboist. Her love of the oboe and of music, in that specific order, has opened up numerous new chapters in her musical career.

Maja Kojc, born in 1968, studied piano and oboe at lower and secondary music schools in Ljubljana, then she continued her education at the Ljubljana Academy of Music and decided to study at the “Mozarteum” University in Salzburg. Here she graduated and obtained her master’s degree under Professors Arthur Jensen and Lothar Koch. As a student she won several prizes at various competitions. In Salzburg she was also a regular member and soloist in the chamber orchestra Pro Musica, and she participated in various chamber groups and modern music ensembles. She has been an oboe soloist for the RTV Slovenija Symphony Orchestra since 1993, and since 1996 she has taught oboe and bassoon at the Secondary Music and Ballet School in Ljubljana. She has ap-

peared as a soloist, chamber and orchestra musician in Europe, Asia and America, and she was a founding member of the wind quintet Ariart, which she recently left. All this says a lot about Maja. The experience, knowledge and character she has acquired have over the years led her to a story that is one of the most important in her life. This is OFF, the festival of oboe and bassoon.

She encountered it in Austria, where it was born and where, in a very different form to the one in Slovenia, it is still going. But Maja moved it to Slovenia, choosing the sea and Izola, although the OFF festival, which is a successful and also protected trademark, now also draws large numbers elsewhere. Why did Maja even get involved with OFF, which in five years has done a great deal for the recognition of the oboe and bassoon?

“It was of course a desire to offer young oboists and bassoonists playing these lesser known and also expensive instruments an opportunity, which they would otherwise not always get, or which they could not afford. Once a year, during the holidays, they gather in one place – young people from different European countries, with different ages and levels of previous knowledge. At Izola they get everything: under various assistants they gain skills, give concerts and they learn to make the mouthpieces for these instruments. We also arrange an exhibition of sheet music, accessories and instruments. OFF is a story without boundaries in the geographical, musical and human senses

of the word. Its special quality lies in the fact that it is a mass event, international and accessible to all without pre-selection. Its aim is for young people to exploit all the opportunities offered by OFF, while at the same time OFF accepts their desires and initiatives. In this way the knowledge and experience of the assistants is enriched with the youthful freshness and desires of the participants.”

The assistants, teachers of oboe and bassoon, accompanist and conductor – there were 10 such staff this year – come from Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Croatia, Italy, Hungary and Israel. They differ from each other greatly, which is of course a factor of the way they work, play and teach, and this is tied to a particular environment. “This is precisely the aim of OFF,” says Maja Kojc, “so that various different approaches come together in one place, which is not possible in a regular music school. And especially not with instruments that do not have such mass appeal, and oboe and bassoon departments are small at music schools.”

Every year the OFF participants give several concerts in Izola, and they have also made guest appearances in Ljubljana, Celje and Postojna. Performing is of course a central part of them coming together. Their work – and they are together for 10 days – would be in vain if they could not present it to the public. After all, music comes alive when it has an audience. Through performances they get over stage fright. When you hear them and see them, it is hard to believe that



they are nervous before performing. A single glance at them, when they are together in the **OFF Band**, which combines teachers and students and every year literally fills the magical Manzioli Square in Izola, offers a vision of optimism. It seems as though over the years a kind of special "OFF people" profile has been formed, and Maja Kojc describes it thus: "Of course these are exceptionally motivated young people. This is not necessarily tied to talent or their success rate, but to their interest. Among them there are also plenty who are deciding what they are going to devote themselves to professionally in life. And those who in fact with the help of OFF are preparing for important musical tests such as competitions, entrance exams and orchestra auditions. So they are interested in the different views of very different teachers. So in the most practical way, in one place they gain an insight into what is happening around the world. Very rarely could they afford to travel around getting to know foreign academies or afford private lessons with professors."

It is no surprise that OFF is linked to numerous human stories. Every year they also include some quite touching ones. A young person who is talented, but owing to social pressure is perhaps playing on a poor instrument and cannot really afford any additional

education, Maja recalls. And she adds: "Our instruments are expensive, and not every music school can offer them to students. Many people cannot afford an instrument, and they play on old, poorly maintained instruments, without even any money for a mouthpiece. At OFF, the teachers can offer them some minimal, of course merely human, and non-organised assistance for repairing instruments or for buying the basic essentials. This happens automatically, this is the spirit of OFF, which affirms that the right people are involved in it. It would of course be nice if we could help them in an organised way, with instrument purchasing, grants ... I hope that this too will be possible some time in the future."

The future of OFF. A chapter of its own. This year's fifth OFF was undoubtedly a milestone. It has brought the need for clear vision, since over the years it has become much more than a project. It has become a mission. And Maja's personal mission. This says a lot about her as a person. OFF generates energy in every pore, and this does not die when the festival is over. OFF is an event and a musical gathering, for which composers write and arrange compositions. Especially for it. The first to write for OFF was Bojan Glavina, Dušan Bavdek arranged his composition *Hoquetus* for OFF, Nenad

Firšt, who has now been the OFF Band conductor for two years, dedicated his composition *Play Off* to the festival, and this year for the first time Maja Kojc premiered in Slovenia a composition by the Serbian composer Ivan Jevtić, who also attended the festival. Last year OFF participants devoted a part of their concert to arrangements of the compositions of Mojmir Sepe, who was thrilled to hear them performed for the first time in such a way.

In five years, like a young tree, OFF has grown new branches – in Krško Maja Kojc has established the biennial competition "OFF BEAT" for oboe, bassoon and chamber groups. Meanwhile OFF and Friends is an emerging story of the coming together and concert-playing of the assistants who teach at OFF and want to perform together in various groups. And together with Maja Kojc and the other OFF people they want to continue writing the OFF story in Slovenia. Far-reaching and recognisable, as it has been, and also in other countries of Europe and the world. The music can of course easily do this, while the OFF FESTIVAL also offers a heart-warming quality, which is also in the music, a rare, wonderful and not entirely automatic phenomenon. OFF play on!

www.off-play-on.si



NATURAL TRAILS

Jože Prešeren, photo: Darinka Mladenovič

BEEKEEPING IN SLOVENIA

SLOVENIAN HONEY – A NEW EUROPEAN TRADEMARK



Slovenia is the only European Union Member State to have protected its native bee, the Carniolan bee (*Apis mellifera carnica*), which in other words means that in Slovenia only this breed of bee can be raised. The Carniolan bee is famed for its docility, hard work, humility and excellent sense of orientation; owing to the tiny grey hairs on its abdominal hoops, Slovenian beekeepers fondly call it the *kranjska sivka*, or Carniolan grey. So it is this bee that is

one of the rare internationally recognised and protected features of our country. This breed of bee has become established in the majority of the countries of former Yugoslavia and Central Europe, and it is regarded as the second most widespread bee breed in the world. For this reason special attention is devoted to preserving and cultivating the pure Carniolan bee, which is also regarded as part of the natural and cultural heritage of Slovenia.



Another special feature of Slovenian beekeeping that has gained international recognition is in the area of folk art – this being the art of painting beehive panels, something not known anywhere else in the world. The beginnings of this folk art can be traced back to the middle of the 18th century, when the painting of farm furniture was very popular, and painting on glass was also known in this period. The smooth wooden panels on the front of bee houses posed a challenge for numerous folk artists, and this gave rise to fascinating images that turned simple bee houses into veritable open-air art galleries. The pictures on individual bee houses of course also helped the bees in their orientation, and made it easier for the beekeeper to remember individual houses. Of course there are no longer any bee houses from those times, but Slovenia's museums have preserved a good number of original paintings from which countless replicas have been made – new beehive panels done in the antique style are among the more original Slovenian tourist souvenirs. It should also be noted, of course, that numerous Slovenian beekeepers still like to decorate their bee houses to this day along the old patterns, but using modern motifs.

At the same time we should mention that throughout their history, Slovenian beekeepers have also devoted special care to the bee houses themselves. In previous centuries the favourite was the long, low wooden kranjič bee house, which was light for handling and also

for transporting on wagons. In the last hundred years, the majority of these bee houses have been replaced by a house invented by one of the most famous Slovenian beekeepers, Anton Žnidaršič. Nowadays it is used throughout Slovenia as well as in some neighbouring countries; this, too, is popular because of its easy handling and suitability for transporting. This bee house is simply called the AŽ-house.

Slovenia – homeland of famous beekeepers

Slovenian beekeepers often claim that there is no nation in the world so emotionally tied to bees as the Slovenians. Slovenians use numerous folk sayings and expressions regarding this relationship, and perhaps the most common is this: marljiv kot čebela [busy as a bee]. It is also true that this pursuit is still highly popular among Slovenians, and whenever we read reports in the newspapers of the accidental killing of bees by various modern poisons that are used in farming, it is almost as though we are reading about a national disaster. People in these parts have been involved in making honey and keeping bees for centuries, since honey was the only accessible sweetener. Historically, the Slovenians have also accounted for a

series of famous men who established the professional foundations of beekeeping. In the 18th century, when Austrian Empress Maria Theresa founded a beekeeping school in Vienna, the first teacher of beekeeping at this school was the Slovenian Anton Janša (1734-1773), a native of the village of Zabreznica near Bled. Even before this appointment he was famed as a great theorist and practitioner in beekeeping. He wrote two books in German on beekeeping, and for those times they were a real discovery for everyone involved in it who could not fathom certain laws governing the lives of bees.

Exceptional credit for developing Slovenian beekeeping also goes to the priest and teacher Peter Pavel Glavar (1721-1784), who in his time made great efforts for the spiritual and material advancement of the Slovenian people. He translated Janša's book on bees from German into Slovenian, and added to it his own experiences. He also founded his own beekeeping school and even a beekeeping cooperative; he was regarded as the best educated beekeeper in the then Slovenian lands. Many of his tips are still heeded by beekeepers today. One of the most famous Slovenian beekeepers was the previously mentioned Anton Žnideršič (1874-1947). All of them, as well as other distinguished Slovenian beekeepers, contributed to beekeeping becoming a noteworthy sector of the economy with a whole



range of characteristic products – apart from honey, the bees were also raised for beeswax, pollen, royal jelly, propolis and for their venom, which was used medicinally. Beekeeping is also important for the pollination of plants. We should also mention that Slovenian beekeepers publish their own professional magazine, Slovenski čebelar [Slovenian Beekeeper], which boasts a tradition going back more than 130 years!

Slovenian honey – a protected trademark

From the middle of September 2009 it will be possible in Slovenia and certain other EU countries to buy Slovenian honey as a product of protected geographical indication, ensuring the highest quality of our honey. At the same time, Slovenian beekeepers have decided to use a protected Slovenian honey jar in its original form and volume of 720 ml, while in shops it will be possible to find smaller replicas of this jar in 370 ml and 212 ml sizes. Many people will therefore ask: why Slovenian honey? And our beekeepers will reply: because it is high-quality, because it comes from the environment in which we live and because our beekeepers ensure that the honey has truly come from this location.

Slovenian beekeepers can also boast a relatively rich selection of different honeys, depending on the plants from which the bees have collected the sweet juices. And since Slovenia's flora is relatively diverse, so is the selection. Best known perhaps is the flower honey, which holds the flavour of various types of flower, and similar to this is forest honey. Acacia honey has a gentle flavour and is almost colourless, while linden honey is noted for its freshness and chestnut honey has a slightly stronger flavour. Spruce honey has a slight fragrance of resin, as does fir honey.

Apicultural products include numerous other items that have become indispensable in home treatment of many modern-day illnesses. A favourite medicinal product for strengthening



the immune system is pollen, a natural stimulator. Obtaining royal jelly is a very challenging process, but it is used in medicine to reduce blood pressure and for numerous other problems. Another essential product is propolis, which helps treat diseases of the respiratory organs, various skin diseases and more. Beeswax is used to treat inflammation of the oral cavity or throat, while bee venom is used in various preparations for treating arthritis and so forth. Apitherapy, which in many respects complements classical medicine, is the main discipline that deals with treatments using honey and other bee products. This branch of knowledge was founded by the physician Dr. Filip Terč (1844-1917), who worked for most of his life in Maribor, from where he supplied articles for numerous professional publications around the world.

Bee tourism

A few years ago (2003) Ljubljana hosted the world beekeeping congress Apimondia, which was attended by several thousand beekeepers from all over the world. In addition to a series of expert meetings, guests visited numerous Slovenian beekeeping centres, individual private apicultural enterprises and of course the other natural attractions of

Slovenia. After this congress, a number of publications around the world carried a mass of articles about Slovenian beekeepers and about our country, so now each year numerous groups of beekeepers are still visiting Slovenia, especially from Western Europe, and seeing for themselves Slovenia's natural features and of course the larger apicultural holdings.

So which locations do Slovenian beekeepers recommend most strongly that foreign guests visit? First and foremost they like to take guests to the Beekeeping Centre at Brdo pri Lukovici (accessible from the Ljubljana-Celje motorway), which is the headquarters of the Apicultural Federation of Slovenia and numerous other professional services, and also provides areas for tasting, a shop selling bee products and equipment and a restaurant. Many local people and foreign guests also like to see the Beekeeping Museum in Radovljica, which is unique in the world, while in nearby Breznica stands Janša's bee house, which is supposedly just like the one that was there more than 200 years ago. There are also numerous beekeeping attractions in all of Slovenia's other regions, which Slovenian beekeepers are especially fond of visiting while on their group excursions and professional trips. Here it should be noted that in many locations, beekeepers have pooled their resources to establish proper apiary centres with beautifully designed bee houses. The bee houses are in fact a special original feature of Slovenia; they are constructed of various materials, most commonly of wood. The beekeepers like to serve up to visitors local specialties, including some products not previously mentioned – such as honey wine, honey brandy, various tinctures and similar. Recently a sparkling honey drink has appeared as a distinctive product in the world. It is a noble sparkling wine with the flavour of honey. It should be especially emphasised that all beekeepers are also faithful guardians of an unspoilt environment, since they are aware that bees cannot survive in a polluted environment. Another important fact: in Slovenia we produce around 2,000 tons of honey a year, which is sufficient for domestic needs, and when the year is particularly good, some honey can also be exported.



Juš Turk, photo: Darinka Mladenovič

SLOVENIA IS (STILL) A PARADISE FOR MUSHROOM-PICKERS

For such a small country, Slovenia is lucky to have three different climates – the Alpine, Mediterranean and Pannonian – for they give rise to an extremely wide variety of different mushrooms. And indeed, mushroom-picking has probably been the country's most widespread


recreational activity over the past few decades. For many people there is no healthier or more pleasant activity than an early morning walk through the freshness of forest and glade, regardless of whether one spots a mushroom or not.

This summer has been quite a dry one, which means fewer mushrooms. Many forests, particularly those on the Pokljuka plateau, are so full of people in the autumn months that some joke that the pickers sometimes outnumber the mushrooms. But there are still many other areas containing mushrooms in abundance, particularly in Dolenjska, Notranjska and in the woods of Goričko in Prekmurje. The mushroom season in Slovenia lasts from the end of March, when pickers go mad for Yellow Morels (*Morchella esculenta*), which are usually fairly few in number, to the colder autumn months, when the frost puts paid to the last of the Dingy Agarics (*Tricholoma portentosum*). Some mushrooms appear, although not every year, in July and August, and most in September and November (only, of course, if the weather conditions favour their growth). Porcini mushrooms (*Boletus edulis*), for example, were still growing last December, the first few days of which were unusually warm.

Frequent gatherings of mushroom- pickers and numerous mushroom exhibitions

Every year gatherings take place in various places around the country organised by mushroom societies, under the umbrella of a general association. Visitors to these events are able to see the many types of mushrooms picked in Slovenia, get to know them a bit better, talk about them, exchange experiences and, moreover, try dishes prepared with mushrooms. Mushroom exhibitions also take place every year as part of a series of events called Narava-zdravje, or 'nature and health'. However, Slovenia does have a fairly strict regulation on the picking, sale and protection of some 70 varieties of wild mushroom.

However, in the last 30 years, many pickers have become concerned about the excessive bear population, and more particularly by the presence of infected ticks, responsible for tick-borne encephalitis, a serious disease for which there is a vaccine, and the slightly milder Borelliosis, for which a vaccine has not yet been developed. Infected ticks are, unfortunately, expanding rapidly to areas of forest and shrubland in which they were previously not present. This partly prevents the intensive gathering of mushrooms – and of course spoils for the fun for many pickers.



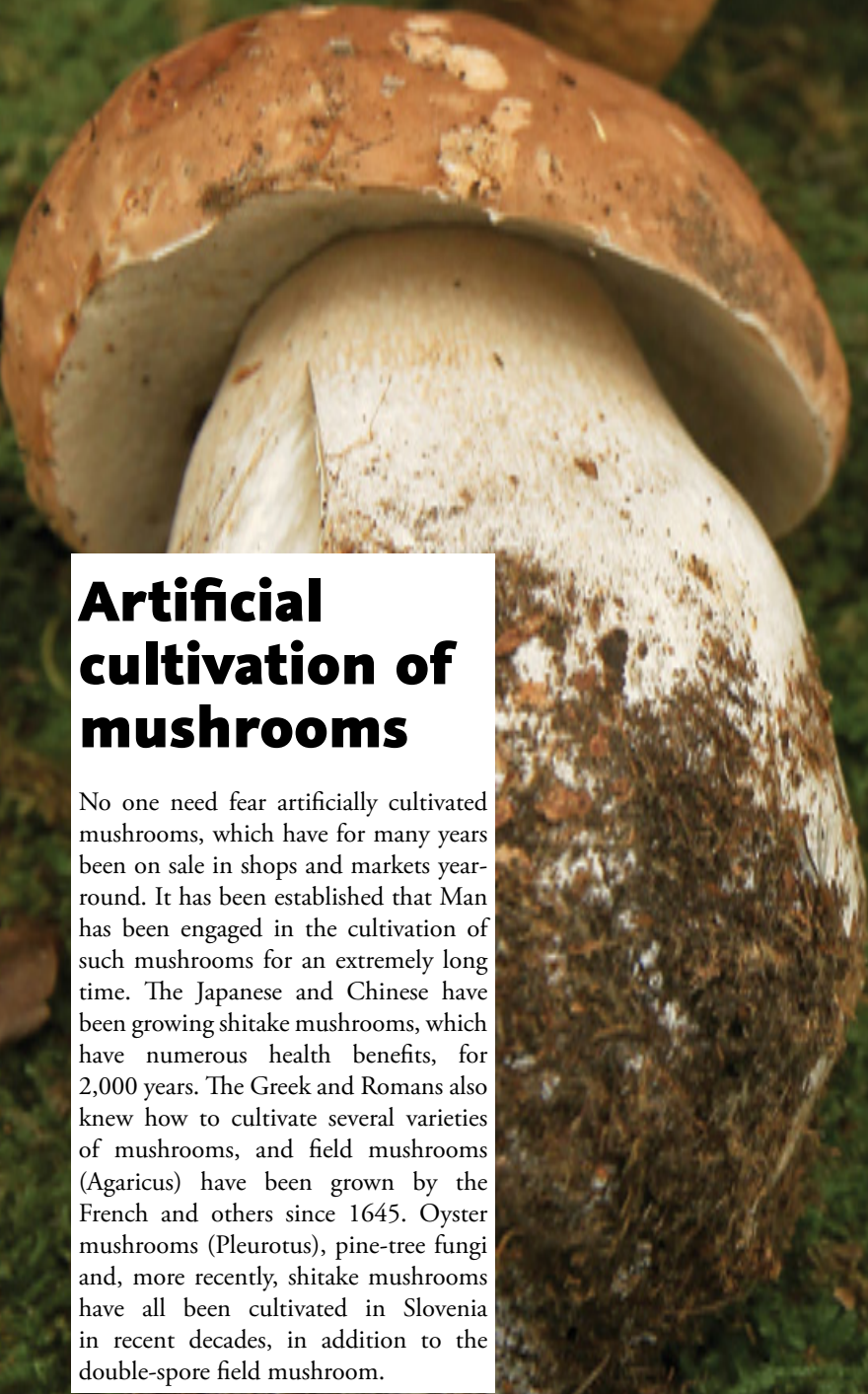
Where are these little paths?

So goes the Slovenian national song. These paths are disappearing because Man is increasingly and more intensively encroaching on forests and glades. Here is an example: even up until a few years ago, there was a paradise for mushroom enthusiasts in an area south of Slovenia’s capital, Ljubljana. Everything grew there, and alongside one particular thicket one could pick up to 30 porcini mushrooms. At four spots one could find that most highly prized specimen, the Caesar’s Mushroom or *Amanita caesarea*. Today that area has been completely built on. But despite such examples of Man’s penetration into the natural world, Slovenia can still boast such an array of the widest variety of mushrooms and fungi that there is enough left over for export, mostly to Italy. More than 10 tons of fresh mushrooms are sold at Ljubljana market every year; these are, of course, mostly porcini, chanterelles (*Cantharellus*), Honey Fungi (*Armillariella*), Gypsy Mushrooms (*Rozites caperata*), Parasol Mushrooms (*Macrolepiote*), Dingy Agarics (*Tricholoma portentosum*) and Saffron Milk Caps (*Lactarius deliciosus*) with their distinctive red ‘milk’. Years ago, sales at the market were overseen by mushroom experts to prevent poisoning or, at the very least, digestive problems.

Mushrooms as food, but only as an accompaniment

In Slovenia, which can, as we say, truly boast of a large diversity of mushrooms, people know that mushrooms contain a large amount of water and very few calories. And they are aware that they differ from meat by their exceptional aromaticness. So, from both aspects, it leave even the best vegetable behind in its wake. Those who know a bit more about the ingredients of mushrooms point out that they also have a good deal of fibre, vitamins, minerals, unsaturated fatty acids and other health-giving substances. That said, we must treat them with great care. While it is true that the majority of mushrooms found in Slovenia are edible, there are still a little over 30 varieties that are poisonous – and around a third of these carry a risk of death if consumed. But if pickers are familiar with only a few varieties, it too often occurs that others simply trample on and kick them, which does a great disservice to the beauty of nature. Or else some who don’t possess the requisite knowledge might cook up a dish containing harmful or even highly poisonous mushrooms, such as one of the thousands of varieties of gilled mushroom, alongside the edible porcinis, chanterelles, large Parasol Mushrooms and red-Cap *Boletus* mushrooms (*Leccinum aurantiacum*) that almost everyone is familiar with. These gilled varieties include the most poisonous toadstools, such as the Fool’s Mushroom and Destroying Angel (*Amanita verna* and *Amanita virosa*), the Death Cap (*Amanita phalloides*) and the Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*), which is otherwise one of the forest’s most beautiful ornaments. It also happens that someone picks and is subsequently poisoned by a mushroom that has not yet fully grown, because they do not recognise the variety to which it belongs. Or else they suffer digestive problems because they have consumed an old or half-rotten mushroom.

NATURAL TRAILS



Artificial cultivation of mushrooms

No one need fear artificially cultivated mushrooms, which have for many years been on sale in shops and markets year-round. It has been established that Man has been engaged in the cultivation of such mushrooms for an extremely long time. The Japanese and Chinese have been growing shitake mushrooms, which have numerous health benefits, for 2,000 years. The Greek and Romans also knew how to cultivate several varieties of mushrooms, and field mushrooms (*Agaricus*) have been grown by the French and others since 1645. Oyster mushrooms (*Pleurotus*), pine-tree fungi and, more recently, shitake mushrooms have all been cultivated in Slovenia in recent decades, in addition to the double-spore field mushroom.

The development of mycology from Clusius to today

Mycology in the Slovenian lands began developing when the greatest botanist of the 16th century, the Dutchman Carolus Clusius, arrived in Vienna at the invitation of Habsburg Emperor Maximilian II and began to make a study of the mushrooms found in the lands of the Austro-Hungarian Empire; in Slovenia, he paid particular attention to those found in the northeast. His book *Fungorum in Panoniis observatorum brevis historia*, written in Latin, which more or less signalled the start of the scientific study of mushrooms, describes around 120 varieties of ‘higher fungi’. Slovenian writings on mushrooms appeared soon after this. At first they were fairly basic and clumsy, but they were nevertheless important because certain fungi were given the names that had been given them by ordinary people in their own language. At the end of the 18th century, a physician from Idrija, A. Scopoli, wrote two books describing 190 varieties of fungi found on Slovenian territory, also giving several of them the names familiar to the native population. The study of fungi was continued in Slovenia by Simon Robič and W. Voss, followed later by Fran Dolšák; recent decades have seen more detailed and scientific work on mushrooms published by many other writers. The latest books come furnished with even better and more detailed colour photographs. But be careful – if you wish to recognise a particular mushroom properly, you cannot rely simply on a photograph. It is much better to be shown what’s what by an expert, who is able to tell you all its most important characteristics.



**I FEEL
SLOVENIA**

Autumn

Photo: Darinka Mladenović