

Tour des Villes in Tolmin

8th and 9th March 2018



Meeting minutes

Tour des Villes: 4th study visit to Tolmin

Participants: Uroš Brežan (welcome & lunch), Miran Drole, Miro Kristan, Jana Podgornik, Tjaša Maurič; Peter Dakskobler, Alenka Zgaga (Tolmin); Francesco Brollo (Tolmezzo); Ingrid Fischer, Michael Borth, Christoph Stöberl (Sonthofen); Matevž Straus, Miran Podobnik, Janez Podobnik (second day) (Idrija); Claire Simon, Magdalena Holzer (meeting minutes) (Secretariat).

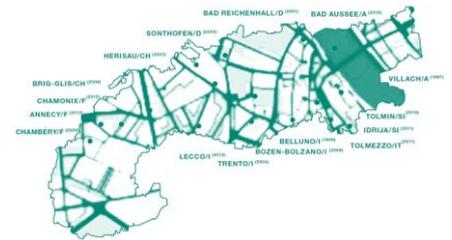
For fast reading see -> (ideas) and the conclusions on page 8.

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Introduction and welcome

By Miro Kristan, PRC gives an introduction in the agenda and organisational information. The discussion on the following day will take place with the whole group, not in smaller groups. Excursion in the afternoon: who wants to stay, please address to Miro.

By Uroš Brežan: welcomes warmly the whole Tour des Villes-group. Personally he won't be able to take part all the time of the meeting.

Claire Simon welcomes in the name of the Alpine Town of the year association and thanks warmly the team from Tolmin for the organisation.

Introduction: Tolmin, some background information

By Jana Podgornik and Tjaša Maurič

Soča Valley, Idrijca Valley, Baška Valley – well interconnected with other regions around Nova Gorica: important gravitation zone 40 km to the south, 2h drive to Ljubljana, 2h to reach Venice.

Julian Alps

Water as tourist attraction: sources, rivers, healing effects

Keywords about Tolmin

Natural diversity, eco farming, Unesco MAB, Triglav national park, revitalisation, land of living water, centralisation, economy, sustainable mobility, countryside, agriculture.

Demography

Concentration in the Tolmin basin, density is quite low, decrease started in the 90s, except Tolmin, the surroundings are decreasing, ageing of population.

Lack of >1000 jobs, negative daily work migrations.

Economy

Industry: automotive (Hidria, Metalflex), water, construction, metal processing, plastics processing, wood processing, machine manufacturing.

Tourism: destination brand: Soča valley, development is very recent, together with Bovec and Kobarid, festivals are occupying 2 months the river Soča in Tolmin and quadrupling the number of inhabitants, cross sectoral approach – local products (trout – fishing tourism; Tolminc cheese – keeping the countryside alive, young farmers). Kmetijska Zadruga Tolmin is a farmers cooperative and offers jobs.

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Generally, private businesses are decreasing, big companies are slightly increasing

Conversion areas in Tolmin

By Miran Drole

One challenge of Tolmin in the past has been its position between borders, therefore problems arised. The barracks were the biggest part of the landscape, what to do now, what could be useful? Only two small parts of the valley were inhabited – one part was a German minority, originating from San Candido/IT. The other part of the settlement, situated on the road leading to Cividale/IT. The Austro-Hungarian monarchy decided to build a train connection and people came moved to this connection, in search for jobs.

Part of Tolmin today has been built on a barrack. There are some more areas, that are still dismissed.

Area 1: the barracks were left by the Jugoslavian army in 1994, then bought at a quite low price and developed to a mixed destination (market center, facilities for production, PRC). Part is private, part is public, some parts could be reused, not everything was destroyed.

Area 2: The area was closed down in 1994, in 5-6 years plans were elaborated and roads could be maintained and was rebuilt. A part of it is private land. In 2008 works were finished and parts have been sold, everything could be sold to local investors.

Area 3: Postaja. Expensive to buy, private ownership, it's completely empty. Is a station, in property of the railway company?

Area 4: Kneza. The Italian army built barracks on green fields, then transformed in wood industry, now it's more or less empty. Some parts are ruined, nobody takes care. Remote area, 4 owners (municipality owns a little part).

Area 5: Podbrdo. Former textile industry, busses went from the valley to the factory. The catastrophe came when the textile industry lost the market in whole Europe.

Podbrdo

Historical facts

Presentation by Srečko Trojer

Baška grapa is a 30km long valley, partly included in the National Park, steep, river Bača has several gorges, grapa means "gorge".

Historic notions: Rapallo border: agreement with Italy (parts of the Slovenian territory was

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given to Italy), Declaration of Independency (1991).

Change of economic activities: first agriculture for own needs only, crafting, foresting. Railway construction around 1906 meant a sudden change (tunnel building, need for craftsmanship, connection with remote locations was established). Wool & wool products, steel, iron ore was transported on the railway corridor. With the growing industry, people abandoned agriculture. Only a few companies were left after the Independency, decreased number of jobs, railway connection became unimportant.

Demographic issues: bad connections with neighbourhood & villages highly populated around 1900. Over aging started from 90s on, young people left the area. Retirement home is a fix part of Podbrdo.

- Geographical limitation is high and naturally influences on possibilities for the future
- One of the big chances is tourism
- Consider aging of population
- Keeping jobs requiring specific knowledge
- Development of (micro) energy production

Tourism

Presentation by Jože Dakskobler, local tourism organisation

When the railway construction started, everything changed: jobs were created, people began to move. The valley today is a touristically very interesting. Dom Zorka Jelinčiča Alpine hut for example is famous for being in between the history of 3 different countries. There is a spectacular flora and a broad network of hiking paths. Walking through the tunnel (7 km) is a touristic attraction. The valley is famous for mountain running, starting in 1970, when the first run was organised with three participants. Twice world events were organised, the events are well visited and well accepted within the population.

Some things to consider for the discussion:

- Idea: trail, including venues from former barrier
- Mountain biking, potential could be used
- Infrastructure, good rail- and road connections
- Accommodation in the valley, private sector mostly
- Good products
- Willingness & sacrifice (still present but not unlimited)

Heritage

by Alenka Zgaga, Društvo Baška dediščina

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Alenka Zgaga is engaged in protection of the heritage, engineering heritage and in re-discovering values, customs of the Baška Valley. The association received ERSAF funds for some initiatives.

What is characteristic for the valley?

- Ventilation device of the railway tunnel Bukovo
- Prangarjev mill with the saw mill (more than 100 years old)
- Blacksmith Jaka (until 1978, preserved equipment)
- Revival of “village holidays” – that brings together a lot of people, who are not living in the valley anymore. People tend to come back when they retire.
- Artist Stanka Golob, that “paints” with natural sand
- The association organises ethnological events and tours upon request.
- The association does a lot of promotion of the area
- Thematic path: On our own land (together with Tolmin museum, Mountaineering Society and the local community)
- Grapar Festival: sustainable development of new offers, innovation
- Old linden tree with an 8m trunk
- Several attractions around water
- Old steam train

Discussions – peer review on the Baška Grapa

Tourism (current trends, future initiatives)

by Peter Dakskobler

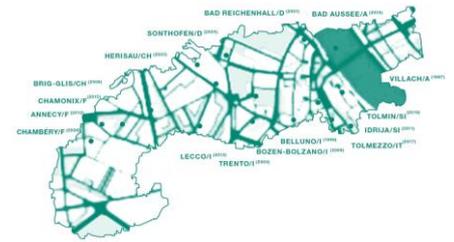
- Slovenia’s Green Destination, Slovenia is a green destination (ITB Berlin)
- Unique: railway connection is a great advantage, but it’s old (car train, bike transport), steam train twice a month with a tourist guide, 6 stations in Baška Grapa, bicycle renting is possible. Challenge: the railway company does not consider itself as an offer for tourism
- Tolmin was discovered in the last 10 years on the tourist map

How to bring live in the area? – creating a vision for sustainable future based on the green tourism?

- ➔ Associations, awareness, calm, green, nature, tunnel, pureness - from wood to wool, and back to the woods.
- ➔ Tunnel could attract young people to do paintings, graffiti, could be a project for more

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years; railway company would be open for such suggestions, there is a whole system of tunnels.

- ➔ Foster & use railway connection, it's difficult to take pictures
- ➔ Don't compete with any other place, what makes the place authentic has to be maintained. The right balance has to be found.
- ➔ Instagram-Map: mark spots. Koritnica or Grahovo are such spots.
- ➔ Train stations: could be more welcoming, "You are in the middle of no-where, calm-pure-where, nature-where..."
- ➔ Modern forms of railways: "the way is the aim", slow-travelling.
- ➔ Wool-fabric: no machines left, no sheep in the valley, why? Socialists brought work to people that were living in the mountains. Idea: present socialist economic thinking – no economic reason to have a factory in this valley. The factory is still alive in the mind of people.
- ➔ Not only tourism: local and especially young people need jobs, otherwise they will leave the valley, increase the participation of local people.
- ➔ Connection point: promote Podbrdo together with Bohinj, promote the lower part with Tolmin. This could be an asset too, not only a disadvantage.
- ➔ Develop a living modern culture – new ways of using the factory, develop new types of crafts, services, fab-labs. Offer should suit the people that live there, not the tourists among all.
- ➔ Cleansing-holiday from digitalization: no Internet, no modern luxury. There is already some request. "recharge in the middle of nowhere". Attention: disconnection is good in part, but be careful! Internet links to the rest of the world.
- ➔ Connect health & fresh water. Kneipp-holiday. There is a clinic for young persons with mental diseases that is full. There would be potential.
- ➔ Guiding: there should be an organisation responsible to guide local people, towards new ideas, new forms of working, new approaches, goals, motivate to cooperation!
- ➔ Mountain running: example from France: trail station for running, complete concept and offer for runners – running paths, special offer on food, close cooperation with an equipment company made in France. Low infrastructure costs.

Cycling & biking in Julian Alps, pressure on habitats and people as tourism in last year increased by 15% in the area of Bohinj, Bled, Kranjska Gora and Tolmin.

Biking: liability is split up on wood land and farming land. The owners are not liable. In Germany this is different, owners are liable for accidents happening on their property. The biking community in Slovenia is quite big. Trans Slovenia (363 km long, 8963 m of elevation – where to eat, where to stay?)

- ➔ Tourists can hire a local guide that go running, biking with you, etc. Idea: help locals to develop a story. USP: variety!

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- ➔ Accommodation: develop capacity to accommodate more people as people are only passing through at the moment. Albergo Diffuso could be a possibility. Or Glamping.
- ➔ Include young people in elaborating a vision for this valley!
- ➔ Develop wood chain: there are young people interested in this field in producing furniture
- ➔ Develop wool chain: women are working wool in their leisure time, could be fostered.
- ➔ Support the precious young people that have their own ideas
- ➔ Fair-trade: develop the idea – facilities, selling the stories, less quantitative
- ➔ Improve signs for tourists in the valley – is lacking
- ➔ Tourism office at the petrol station? As a lot of people are only travelling through and the tourism office is very difficult to find.

Economy: revitalization

By Alenka Zgaga

Combine with tourism and craft. A lot of people have their workshop at home to reduce costs.

The oldest building is in the best condition; probably it is not possible to renovate the other buildings. Two buildings are built on the river, this is not accepted anymore.

There is no current interest by companies to expand in this region.

How to rebuild the story of the place and a story for this place?

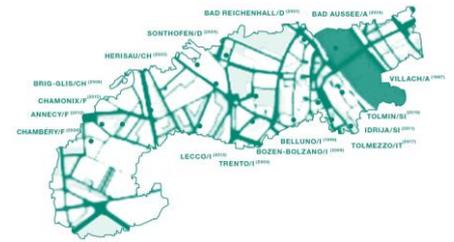
- ➔ Identify and write down, which workshops are existing in the valley. Identify needs and wishes of the population, especially young people.
- ➔ Rental bike centre out of one of the buildings with workshop, that repairs bikes and motorbikes
- ➔ Be pragmatic! These buildings are not corresponding to the standard anymore.
- ➔ Why are companies not interested to move there? Is it the difficult accessibility? If not, maybe they would be interested to move, if the building were renovated before? To find out for future thinking.
- ➔ New agricultural products: mushrooms, cereals for craft beer production, herbs (herb village Irschen), seeds
- ➔ Teaching how to drive trains in this area.

Conclusions

- Train & tunnel seem to be central and linking elements, considering the difficulties that has been mentioned.
- Nature, authenticity, welcoming culture and hospitality came out further as strong elements.

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- Sports destination: biking, hiking.
- Bridge between two linking poles Bohinj and Tolmin is a central one, now people do not stop, there is a need in developing this connection, that now is lacking.
- Developing tourism has to be part of a broader, general development
- Need for identity: is “the middle of nowhere” an identity? That is not clear yet. This could be a point for the discussion in the valley.
- Participation: what kind of life do people in the valley want to have? Involve young people from the valley and outside in future workshops and use (also temporarily) these spaces to generate local activity.
- Heritage and strong history: there is need of a new spirit, a new way of looking on this heritage to enable a modern type of life.
- Think before on what the valley needs. That might not fill the buildings, but create something that people need. The next step be could be a broader discussion with inhabitants, companies, and also people, that left the valley.
- Central question is the resource: people, knowledge, activity. How to activate them? The vision should come from them.

Further steps of the Tour des Villes project

Excursion: Claire Simon presents the programme of the excursion to Basel, Switzerland and Freiburg, Germany on 23rd and 24th April. Both sites to be visited are former conversion areas, one military compound and one former train station area. The overnight costs will be covered by the project; participants have to take over their costs for the journey. We have 25 places, please register as soon as possible, the remaining places will be communicated to other members of the association too, who can take part for a fee. Per Tour des Villes town a participation in the framework of their participation of the study visits is foreseen.

Final product: based on the ideas by the Tour des Villes members, within the Secretariat two ideas were picked out to be followed. The proposed idea of a photobook and a public event on conversion areas. The second idea needs a separate funding request. The event could take place in spring 2019. Regarding the first one, a professional photographer could visit all Tour des Villes towns to make pictures of the conversion areas and of 1-2 other Alpine town

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topics in each towns. The photos will be used for: photoflash, photobook and possibly poster layouts for each town. The costs are to be confirmed. The member towns accept on developing this idea further.