

THETRIS PROJECT

REGIONAL SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE GORIŠKA REGION



WP 3.3.1

PP9: Znanstvenoraziskovalni center Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti, Raziskovalna postaja v Novi Gorici – Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Research Station Nova Gorica

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION.....	3
2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GORIŠKA REGION.....	4
BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GORIŠKA REGION.....	6
3. REGIONAL SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE GORIŠKA REGION.....	8
SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP.....	8
ROUTES AND LOCATION.....	11
HERITAGE AND PRESERVATION.....	15
LOCAL IDENTITY AND COMMITMENT.....	21
4. BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	23



1. INTRODUCTION

To reach the objectives of the project *THETRIS – Thematic Transnational church Route development with the Involvement of local Society* (Programme Central Europe; 2012-2014) the following regional analysis focused on the Goriška statistical region has been developed in accordance with the *Joint methodology of regional and transnational analysis* (LAMORO Local Development Agency (PP6)) by the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts - Research Station Nova Gorica (Znanstveno-raziskovalna postaja Slovenske akademije znanosti in umetnosti – Raziskovalna postaja v Novi Gorici).

The regional analysis has been prepared on the basis of the study of the regional problematics, of the interviews with same stakeholders (the representative of the Public Institution for Cultural Heritage Protection Mrs. Ernesta Drole, the manager of the Tourist Association Nova Gorica Mrs. Dejana Baša and the president of the non-governmental organization Forum za Goriško mag. Boris Nemeč), of the bibliography (strategies, programmes, etc.) mentioned at the end and of the discussion with the stakeholders at the meeting of the Regional Working Group (RWG) that took place on 8th January 2013 at the Castle of Kromberk near Nova Gorica.



2. DESCRIPTION OF THE GORIŠKA REGION

Goriška is a historical and statistical region at the far west of Slovenia along the border line with Italy. It comprises the northern part of the wider traditional region of the Slovenian Littoral (Primorska). The picturesque Soča River Valley, the fertile Vipava Valley, rolling hills vineyards of Goriška Brda and the beautiful Alpine valleys of Julian Alps are the most prominent natural features of this region.

The region covers an area of 2325 square kilometres, or 11.5 % of the territory of Slovenia. It has a heterogeneous landscape including sub-Mediterranean, Karst, Alpine and pre-Alpine. In 2012, the entire population of the region was 119, 230 persons (0-14 years old: 16, 778; 15-64 years old: 80, 543; aged 65 or more: 21, 909).¹

Goriška, a distinctive rural area, is one of the 12 statistical Slovenian regions (NUTS 3 level) founded in 2007 for statistical and legal purposes. Because of the size of its population (2 million people), Slovenia is treated as a single region at the NUTS 1 level. However, for the purposes of cohesion policy two NUTS 2 regions were formed, Eastern Slovenia and Western Slovenia, within which the twelve NUTS 3 regions are formed. Goriška is part of the largest region Western Slovenia.²

The Goriška statistical region can be sub-divided into 4 sub-regions:

- The Upper Soča Valley (municipalities of Bovec, Kobarid, Tolmin) lies in the north-west of the region and contains part of the Triglav National Park and Julian Alps. Because of the border location and poor agricultural conditions it has been

¹ Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia: <http://www.stat.si>, 3.1. 2013.

² Laura Jones, Michael Woods, Barbara Lampič, *Case study contextual report 6. Goriška*, p. 4.



characterized by out-migration, deagrarianization and depopulation over the past century.

- The Idrijsko-Cerkljansko Hills (municipalities of Cerklje ob Soči and Idrija) are situated in the central-inland part of the region and represent a transitional area between Alpine and Karst landscapes.
- Nova Gorica and its hinterland (municipalities of Brda, Kanal, Miren-Kostanjevica, Šempeter-Vrtojba, Renče-Vogrsko and Nova Gorica) in south-western Goriška, next to the Italian border, consist of the flat Lower Soča Valley and hilly winegrowing region of Brda. The town of Nova Gorica is the principal urban centre in Goriška. It is the area of highest population and employment concentration in the region.
- The Upper Vipava Valley in southern-inland Goriška (municipalities of Ajdovščina and Vipava) consists of flat, fertile areas.³



Municipalities of the Goriška region

Sources: Laura Jones, Michael Woods, Barbara Lampič, *Case study contextual report 6. Goriška*, p. 5.

The Goriška region consists of 13 municipalities: Ajdovščina, Bovec, Brda, Cerklje ob Soči, Idrija, Kanal ob Soči, Kobarid, Miren-Kostanjevica, Nova Gorica, Renče-Vogrsko, Šempeter-Vrtojba,

³ Ibidem, p. 2-3.



Tolmin and Vipava. The municipalities are the "basic self-governing local community, with the authority to manage the municipality's assets, facilitate conditions for economic development, plan spatial development, create conditions for building dwellings, manage local public services, establish primary and nursery schools, and build and maintain local roads".⁴



Church of the Holy Spirit on Javorca plateau

Source: <http://www.potmiru.si>



Franciscan Monastery of Kostanjevica near Nova Gorica

Source: <http://www.camplijak.com>

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GORIŠKA REGION

The Goriška Region as a border area has a rich history and strong historical and cultural ties with neighbouring Italian region Friuli Venezia Giulia, especially the province of Gorizia. Because of its geographical position in the Middle Ages, there took place battles and plundering expeditions, but also migrations of entire nations and ethnic groups. In the early Middle Ages the territory was devastated by invasions of barbarians like Atila's Huns, Avars, Hungarians, etc. After that, the territory was subordinated to the authority of the Patriarchs of Aquileia and later to the Counts of Gorizia, an illustrious and influential dynasty of the Middle Ages' Central Europe. After the dying out of the dynasty of the Counts of Gorizia in 1500, the County of Gorizia was acquired by the Habsburgs. In the 16th and 17th century the

⁴ Ibidem, p. 6.



population of the territory was involved in two wars between the neighbouring Venetian Republic and the Habsburgs, which damaged or ruined some significant castles and other relevant monuments of cultural heritage. During the First World War the region and its population as well as numerous monuments of cultural heritage was hardly damaged by the bloody battles of the Soča Front. Until 1918, the modern Goriška region and the today's eastern part of the Italian region Friuli Venezia Giulia formed a single province, the County of Gorizia, within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After the First World War ended the Treaty of Rapallo was signed between Kingdom of Italy and Kingdom SHS (Serbs, Croats and Slovenians) and new state border was running along the water-shed between the Black and Adriatic Sea. After the Second World War the Peace Treaty from Paris established the new frontier between the Republic of Italy and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (actually Republic of Slovenia). The territory and the population of the former united County of Gorizia were divided. After the breakup of the former Yugoslavia in 1992, Slovenia became an independent and democratic state neighbouring to Republic of Italy. In 2004, Slovenia joined the European Union.



3. REGIONAL SWOT ANALYSIS OF THE GORIŠKA REGION

In accordance with the *Joint methodology of regional and transnational analysis* prepared in November 2012 by LAMORO Local Development Agency (PP6) the regional SWOT analysis has been developed using the analysing schemes of the 4 topics:

1. SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

In the Goriška region, where, in 2009, the regional gross domestic product amounted to 1,359 million EUR,⁵ has been developed various kinds of economic activity: very prosperous electronics industry (Idrija, Solkan, Šempeter pri Gorici, Cerklje na Gori, Tolmin), gaming industry and entertainment, agriculture (sub-Mediterranean fruit growing and viticulture in the Lower Vipava Valley and in the picturesque winegrowing region of Goriška Brda; cattle breeding in the northern part of the region), food processing (Ajdovščina), tourism (cultural tourism, water sports on the Soča River), etc.

One of the strength of the region is the nearness to big markets. In 2012, there was established the European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation – EGTC GO that connect the municipalities of Gorizia (Italy), Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba (Slovenia) in the European legal instrument designed to facilitate and promote cross-border, interregional and transnational cooperation. The close collaboration of Slovenian and Italian municipalities, regions and institutions represents an opportunity for the development of the Goriška region and the entire border area.

⁵ 2012. *Slovene regions in figures*, p. 41.



Strengths

- various kind of economic activity
- accession of Slovenia to the European Union in 2004
- financial support from the European Regional Development Fund and from EU Structural Funds
 - nearness to big markets
- on the crossroads west-east and nord-south freeways
- high diverse tourist attractions from alpine, rolling hills landscape to warm coast
 - well educated people speaking different languages and high adaptive
- multiethnic collaboration and multicultural tolerance tradition

Weaknesses

- lack of extensive foreign direct investments
 - inter-regional disparities in terms of economic development
 - lack of investments in research and development and related activities
 - poor links between science and business
 - lack of support and undeveloped market in innovations
- sparse-populated northern and eastern part of the region
- lack of adventure capital for initial economic investments
- lack of connections between the private and public sector
 - 10,8% registered unemployment rate (October 2012)

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Opportunities

- strong ties with the Italian region of Friuli Venezia Giulia
- European Grouping for Territorial Cooperation – EGTC GO
 - blinding of educational programs with the needs of the economy
- many investment opportunities, special one in leisure tourism

Threats

- unfavourable social, law and economic context for significant and extensiv foreign investments
- scarce support and economic resources for investments
 - increasing level of emigrations of young people to abroad or to other statistical regions
 - lack of coherent and effective regional development
- limited regional political autonomy and quite centralised state
 - bureaucracy of the administrative proceedings



In spite of all that, the weaknesses are the significant lack of large foreign direct investments (this is also the opportunity), inter-regional disparities in terms of economic development, lack of investments in research and development and related activities, deficiency of connections between the private and public sector, poor links between science and business, lack of support and undeveloped market in innovations and deficiency of adventure capital for initial economic investments.⁶ An important problem is also the rising unemployment (in October, rate of 10, 8 %) and sparse-populated northern and eastern part of the region.

The regional policy is focusing on merging the university research knowledge with company development needs. The region is striving for develop innovative products with high added value in terms of the existent and new companies alike, supporting their orientation towards global markets. The preconditions for such a policy are young and high qualified employees and permanent training of the inhabitants.

The Goriška region has well-educated and well-trained workforce, but with a disadvantageous surplus of university graduates in social sciences and humanities and lack of graduates in engineering sciences and technologies. In 1995, there was founded also the University of Nova Gorica with interdisciplinary programmes in sciences, technology, arts and humanities. Some students from the region are also studying at the largest Slovenian university, the University of Ljubljana. There are other key regional institutions such as Technical School Centre, etc.

There is an insufficiency of research-development institutions, although in the 2004 in Nova Gorica has been established the Research Centre of the national Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts.

The threats for a successful socio-economic development are unfavourable social, law and economic context for significant and extensive foreign investments, a quite centralised state, lack of coherent and effective regional development, insufficient support and economic resources for investments and bureaucracy of the administrative proceedings. It represents

⁶ *Programme of measures for promoting entrepreneurship and competitiveness 2007-2013*, p. 4.



an important problem also the increasing level of emigrations of young people to abroad or to other statistical regions.

2. ROUTES AND LOCATION

The Goriška region has a strategic geographical position. The southern part of the region (the Vipava Valley and the area of Nova Gorica) has good road connections both east to Ljubljana (approx. 1 hour from Nova Gorica) and west into neighbouring Venetian area in Italy. In the mountainous northern part of the region the road connections are sparse. The main pass towards the neighbouring region of Gorenjska, leading across the Julian Alps, is closed throughout the colder part of the year. Train and air travel are more limited, with no commercial passenger airports in Goriška (only smaller airports for recreation) and one single-track railway line connecting Nova Gorica and the Lower Soča Valley with the Gorenjska region. From Nova Gorica, there are good cross-border connections into Italy⁷ and so well connected to north through Triest- Gorizia -Klagenfurt freeway.

For the tourist development of the Goriška region are very important historical sites from the First World War and protected landscape areas in the Upper Soča Valley as well as very popular tourism connected with water sports and leisure tourism (kayaking, canoeing, rafting, canyoning, skiing, skydiving, etc.). In 2010, the Goriška region was visited by 233, 127 tourists and the number of overnight stays amounts at 542, 032.⁸

⁷ Laura Jones, Michael Woods, Barbara Lampič, *Case study contextual report 6. Goriška*, p. 3.

⁸ 2012. *Slovene regions in figures*, p. 60-61.



Strengths

- strategic geographical position
- well-known historical sites from the First World War
- protected landscape areas in the Upper Soča Valley
 - heterogeneous mixture of landscape types
- good road connections in the southern part of the region
 - both east to Ljubljana and west to Italy
- well established cross-border transport connections
 - presence of some tourist routes
- the regional tourist route called *Emerald route*
 - availability of digital media

Weaknesses

- limited air and train travel
- bad road connections in the mountainous northern part of the region
- insufficient, although growing tourist development
 - non-connected tourist offer at regional level
 - inadequate digital marketing of the routes
- inadequate, not connected and very insufficient signposting
 - lack of eco friendly public transport
- lack of free wireless public access to internet

ROUTES AND LOCATION

Opportunities

- beautiful and picturesque natural environment
 - proximity to borders with Italy and Austria
- new opportunities for cross-border relations following accession to the European Union
 - better developed of cultural tourism
 - development and marketing of the tourist destination of the historical Goriška region (the Slovene and the Italian part of the region)
- inclusion of the pilgrimage's tourism in the regional tourist offer
 - demand for pilgrimage's tourism

Threats

- ineffective and at regional and transnational level unconnected marketing of the Goriška tourist destination
- lack of cooperation and connections between municipalities
- maintenance and marketing of tourist routes after the end of the projects
- some of the historical sites from the First World War are hardly to access (only by foot)

There have been developed some cultural and tourist routes: e. g.

- the main regional tourist route as the regional destination *Smaragdna pot (The Emerald Way)* along the emerald River Soča,
- the Walk of Peace connecting the most important remains and memorials of the Soča Front in the Upper Soča Valley and dedicated to the memory of the multitude of casualties of the First World War,
- the Kobarid historical walk connecting important historical curiosities such as the remnants of the First World War and the archaeological site of Tonovcov Grad near Kobarid as one of the most important late Antiquity mountain settlements in the eastern Alps,
- the cultural and historical trail of Most na Soči that takes the visitors through three thousand years of the existence of the above-mentioned town which represents an important archaeological and historical site,
- the Alpe Adria Trail along interesting tourist areas with rich cultural, natural and culinary tradition that connects localities in Austria, Italy and Slovenia,
- the Gradnik Trail which leads the visitor among the vineyards and into the heart of the village Medana, the birthplace of the Slovenian poet Alojz Gradnik, and
- the Educational trail of the poet Simon Gregorčič between the villages of Smast and Sv. Lovrenc and the route dedicated to the same poet between the villages of Renče and Gradišče near Prvačina.

In the Goriška region has great importance the regional museum Goriški muzej, which strives hard for the preservation and the promotion of the tangible as well as intangible heritage. At Kobarid, there is the renowned Kobaridski muzej dedicated to the heritage of the First World War, which has received numerous awards for excellence (e. g., in 1993, the Council of Europe Museum Prize). The rich cultural heritage of the Soča Valley is presented by the Tolminski muzej at Tolmin. The Idrija Municipal Museum presents five centuries of the history of the Mercury Mine and the town of Idrija. In 1997, the museum received the award for Best European Museum of Industrial and Technical Heritage. There are also numerous historical, ethnological, archaeological museum collections (e. g. at Most na Soči, Kluže, Cerkno, Kobarid, Ajdovščina, Vipava, Nova Gorica, Lipica, Štanjel, Cerje, Tomaj, Vrtojba,



Miren, Vrsno, Breginj, Robidišče, Baška Grapa, Idrijska Bela, Drežnica, Trenta, Predmeja, Dobrovo, Podbrdo, Slap ob Idrijci, Kromberk, Sveta Gora, etc.) and numerous private museum collections dedicated especially to the First World War or to ethnological heritage. There are also numerous open-air museums (e.g. Kolovrat, Zapikraj) and special parks (e. g. Sabotin Peace Park, Geopark Idrija) that presents some particularities of the rich regional's cultural heritage. In the Goriška region lies one of the most beautiful European railway track, the Bohinj railway line (it. Ferrovia Transalpina, ger. Wocheinerbahn) that dates back to the beginning of the 20th century and it is located along the picturesque River Soča (Jesenice-Triest).

There are also some weaknesses such as the insufficient, although growing tourist development, non-connected tourist offer at the regional level and inadequate digital marketing of the tourist destination. Another problem is also the inadequate, not connected and very insufficient signposting, that is the result of too complicated proceedings for the signposting of landmarks.

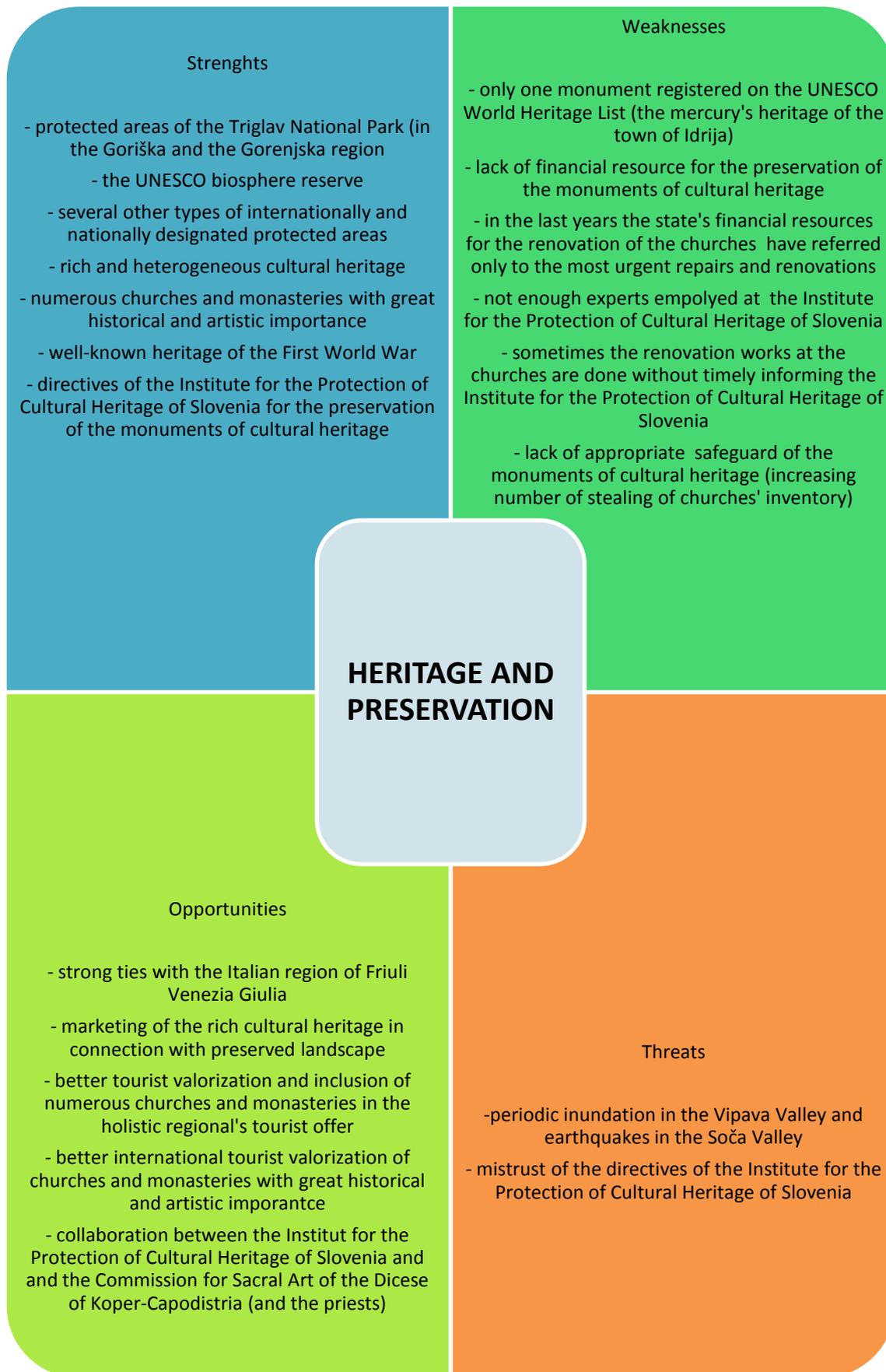
One of the main opportunities is better development of cultural tourism that has to be managed as the tourist destination of the entire historical Goriška region (it. Il Goriziano) (the Italian and the Slovene part of the historical region). It is also important to develop tourist connections at transnational level and to connect e.g. the pilgrimage's tourism with other regional tourist offer (e.g. the historical sites from the First World War).

The treats are lack of cooperation and connections between municipalities, ineffective and at regional and transnational level (especially at the border area Italy-Slovenia) unconnected marketing of the tourist offer. A problem is also the sustainability, particularly the maintenance and the marketing of the tourist routes after the end of the European or national projects that financed them only for a defined time.

A lot of monuments of cultural heritage are easily accessible by foot or by car, but some monuments (e.g. open-air museums of the First World War, some pilgrimage's churches) are hardly accessible (only by foot).



3. HERITAGE AND PRESERVATION



For the protection of the cultural heritage has great importance the protected area of the Triglav National Park located in the north-west of Slovenia, more precisely in the Julian Alps. It covers 880 square kilometres, or 3% of the territory of Slovenia. The cultural heritage of the Triglav National Park is very interesting and picturesque, because the park lies at the meeting point of various climates as well as various cultures. The principal task of the Triglav National Park Public Institution is the protection of the area, but it is also responsible for specialist and research tasks. Although protection and conservation of pristine nature is the primary objective of the park, it is also responsible for the preservation of autochthonous, pristine cultural heritage as the basis for sustainable development. According to the type of heritage, secular architectural heritage prevails, followed by memorial heritage, settlement heritage, religious architectural heritage and archaeological heritage, the protection of cultural heritage encompasses buildings, archaeological sites, settlement areas, man-made nature and cultural landscape, etc.⁹ The Triglav National Park stimulates sustainable development policies and strives to balance the needs of landscape conservation with the agriculture, forestry and tourism, etc. - and the livelihood of local populations. Sustainable agricultural practices (organic farming, promotion of local products, high-altitude pasture farming, etc.) help to preserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Triglav National Park.¹⁰

⁹ Triglav National park. Official site: http://www.tnp.si/national_park, 4. 1. 2013.

¹⁰ Laura Jones, Michael Woods, Barbara Lampič, *Case study contextual report 6. Goriška*, p. 16-17.



The Julian Alps are also recognized as the UNESCO biospheres reserve, encompassing the whole of the Triglav National Park as well as the surrounding regions. There are also several other types of internationally and nationally designated protected areas (45 sites within the Natura 2000 European network).

The preserved environment is not only strength, but also an opportunity for the development of the area. In order to fully benefit from this opportunity, it is important to base the development of the countryside and the promotion of tourism on the protection of this preserved environment. The region has to encourage the proper use of natural and cultural heritage and prevent the misuse of the environment.

In the Goriška region, there is a rich and heterogeneous cultural heritage. The bloody battles that took place during the First World War in the Soča Valley have left many traces in the mountain paradise (forts, grotesque tunnels and caverns, numerous graveyards with militarily arranged crosses, etc.). The Soča Front, which represents one of the greatest mountain military campaigns in the world, was treated by the American author Ernest Hemingway in the novel *A farewell to arms*. There are also numerous important monuments of cultural history such as numerous picturesque castles, fortresses and ancient manor houses, churches of great historical and artistic importance, etc., as well as archaeological and ethnological sites. In spite of all that, in the Goriška region only the mercury's heritage of the town of Idrija is registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List. The politics have to try harder to reach the registration of other important elements of cultural heritage to the above-mentioned list.

Regarding to the sacral cultural heritage, there are numerous churches and monasteries of great historical and/or artistic importance: e.g.

- the Kostanjevica Franciscan Monastery, near Nova Gorica, with the crypt of the last French King Karl X Bourbon and his family and the precious monastery's library,
- the picturesque wooden Memorial Church of Holy Spirit at Javorca constructed during the First World War by soldiers in memory of their fallen comrades,



- the church and the Franciscan monastery at Sveta Gora (the Holy Mountain) with ancient pilgrimage tradition,
- the Church of St. Anton at Kobarid with the Charnel House (with the mortal remains of 7, 014 Italian soldiers killed in the First World War)
- the Church of Saint Mary in the village of Ponikve as the masterpiece of the greatest slovenian architect Jožef Plečnik, etc.



The memorial Church of Holy Spirit at Javorca

Source: <http://www.slovenia.info>



Church of St. Anton with the Charnel House

Source: <http://www.dolina-soce.com>

The monuments of the cultural heritage of the Goriška region are imperilled by periodic inundation in the Vipava Valley and earthquakes in the Upper Soča Valley. Only in the 20th century on the territory of Slovenia occurred 15 large earthquakes (earthquakes larger than VII EMP (European Macroseismic Scale)) which caused minor or major damage to monuments.¹¹ The 2004 earthquake damaged a lot of monuments of cultural history, but the Post-earthquake Reconstruction of Structures and Development Promotion in Posočje Act passed by the Slovenian parliament in 2005 has represented also an opportunity because a lot of monuments of cultural heritage, especially churches, have been renovated.

The preservation of the monuments of cultural heritage is subject to the national directives of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia, but the experts of the

¹¹ Močni potresi v preteklosti, without pagination.



institute complain about the mistrust of their work and their directives. Sometimes the renovation works at the churches are done without timely informing the experts of the Institute, which do not have enough experts to supervise all the territory. For this reason it is very recommendable better cooperation between the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia and the priests or the Commission for Sacral Arts of the Diocese of Koper-Capodistria.

It is also problematic the funding of the renovation works at the churches, which are mostly accepted as cultural monuments and so their protection is tied with the laws regarding the protection of this kind of monuments, but on principle the state and some municipalities are not favourable to finance the renovation of monuments that are not property of the state or the municipalities. In the last years the state's financial resources for the renovation of the churches have referred only to the most urgent repairs and renovations. Another problem is the safeguard of precious inventory of the churches, because of the increasing number of thefts.

The main opportunity for the preservation of the churches and monasteries is their better tourist valorisation and inclusion in the holistic Goriška tourist offer. It is recommendable also a better cooperation between the tourist information centres and the priest to bring into line the valorisation of the sacral cultural heritage. This will help also to acquire the financial resources for their preservation.

The Goriška region has also a rich and various intangible heritage. The Ministry of education, science, culture and sport of the Republic of Slovenia is been preparing a Register of intangible heritage of Slovenia. Some of the yet registered cases are from the Goriška region. From the register will be selected some cases that will be proposed for the inscription on the UNESCO heritage list.

In the past the Goriška region had a high developed handicraft sector, but unfortunately in the period after the Second World War it decreased because of the industrialization. Today there are a lot of initiatives for the revitalisation of the handicraft sector and of the traditional skills and some have scored a success thanks to the connection with the tourist



sector (for example the manufacture of woollen products in the area of Bovec, the traditional making of cheese in the area of Tolmin, etc.).



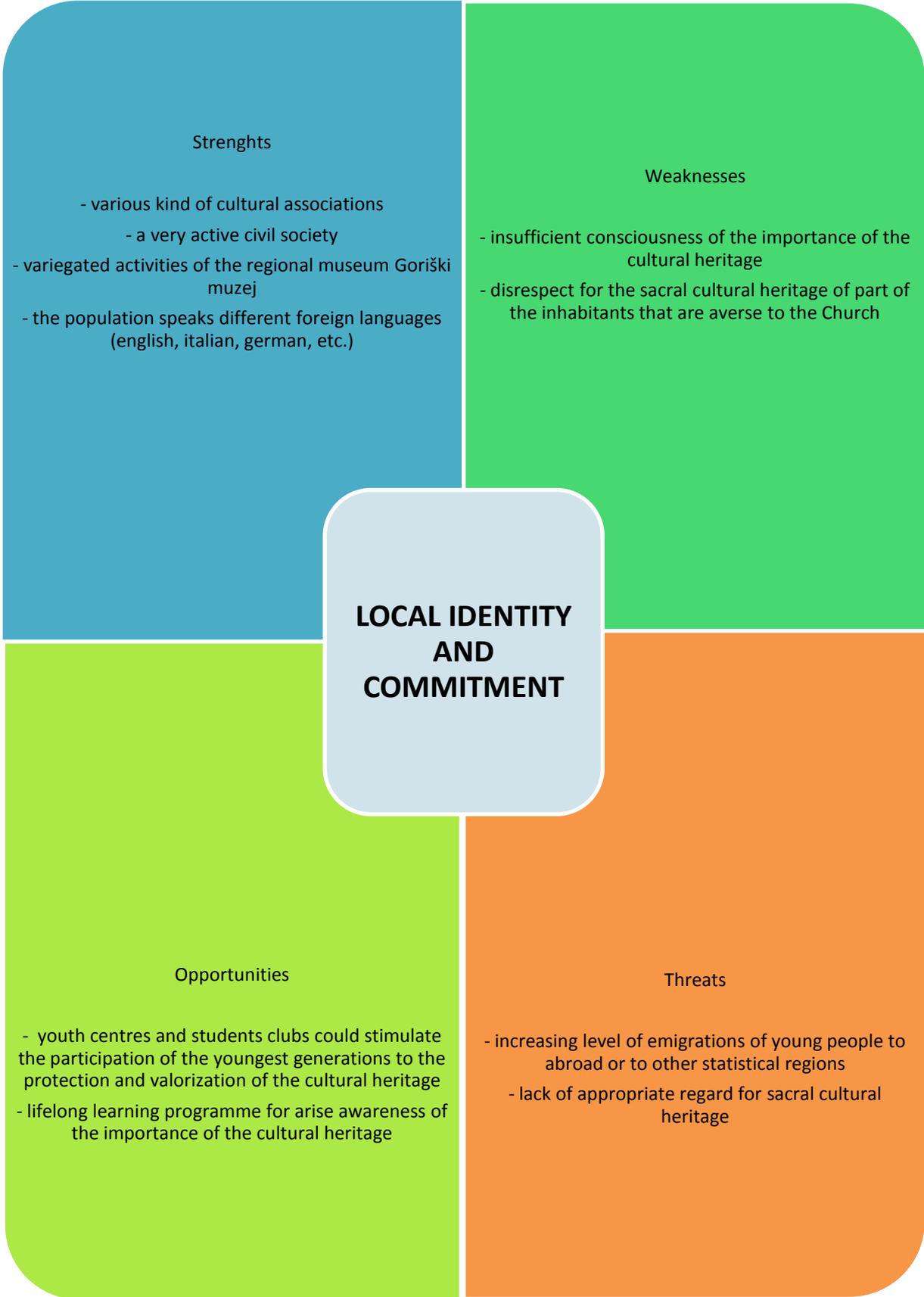
4. LOCAL IDENTITY AND COMMITMENT

In the Goriška region, there are various kinds of cultural, sporting, recreational and other types of associations, particularly popular with adults and elders. The young people prefer youth centres and students clubs,¹² which could stimulate the participation of the youngest generations to the protection and valorisation of the cultural heritage. It represents a threat the increasing level of the emigration of young people to abroad or to other statistical regions. The civil society is very active, but the awareness of the importance of the regional cultural heritage is still insufficient. For this reason is very important to raise this awareness of the local community (especially of the locals averse to the Church and the immigrants).

For successful valorisation and promotion of the cultural heritage it is essential the collaboration between local communities and civil, development, expert and economic institutions. There is also very important to intensify the cooperation with the nearby Italy and other European countries.

¹² Laura Jones, Michael Woods, Barbara Lampič, *Case study contextual report 6. Goriška*, p. 6.





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