

# Berichte

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International Symposium

## **The Future of Tourism in the Alpine-Adriatic Region In Commemoration of Zlatko Pepeonik, 1934 – 2004**

**Organizers:** Southeast Europe Association e.V. (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft/SOG) and its Klagenfurt branch / Austrian Geographical Society and its Klagenfurt branch / University of Klagenfurt, Faculty of Social Sciences, Department of Geography and Regional Research / University of Zagreb, Faculty of Science, Department of Geography / Croatian Geographical Society

**Hermagor (Carinthia, Austria), 22 – 24 October 2024**

*Report by Peter Jordan, Hermagor/Vienna*

### **Research Questions and Major Results**

The symposium aimed to provide answers to the following two important questions: What does climate change mean for tourism in the Alpine-Adriatic Region, especially the coastal areas of the northern Adriatic and their partly mountainous hinterlands? What does the ongoing migration from rural areas and the desire for a more pleasant work-life balance mean for the recruitment of tourism workers?

On the first question, the keynote speech by Andrea Fischer, the “Austrian Scientist of the Year 2024”, delivered by Lea Hartl (both Institute for Interdisciplinary High Mountain Research of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in Innsbruck), showed the dramatic consequences of climate change using the example of the drastic retreat of the Alpine glaciers. Lack of snow in winter and high summer temperatures are already leading to leveling out winter and summer tourist peaks in the Alps and the striking summer peaks on the Adriatic coasts. This will pave the way for a more balanced annual tourism cycle, which will probably only increase. Spring and autumn can win, which may very well mean that less tourist capacity needs to be provided

and the returns on invested capital increase. This, however, requires an attractive tourist offer also in these periods. Good opportunities in this respect are hiking and cycling. An inspiring and already proven example from Croatia was also mentioned: small art festivals in small places that have hardly been visited by tourists before. They change the image of the places, and guests visit them also out of “festival time”. However, festivals should not be “imposed” on-to places from outside but arise from the local culture or be based or initiated on/by a local artist.

On the Adriatic coast, the hot summer temperatures could be made more endurable by more natural green and shady areas with tall trees near the beaches. The revival of high-quality climatic health tourism in the winter months – as it flourished in Opatija in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century – is also conceivable. In her keynote speech, *Daniela Soldić Frleta* (Faculty of Tourism and Hotel Management in Opatija) mentioned this possibility.

On the specific issue of “overtourism”, the keynote by prominent Slovenian geographer *Anton*

*Gosar* (University of Primorska, Koper-Capodistria), honorary member of the Southeast Europe Association, hinted at various possible solutions by European examples. A paper on the Slovenian Alps (see further below), where some mountain routes and peaks are occasionally congested, proposed in this context to offer detailed maps, also available digitally, of ascent options and (even smaller) sights along these options, so that hikers might consider alternative routes.

On the question of recruiting tourist workers in rural tourism areas affected by outmigration, it was noted that tourism in many such areas is already a "business between externals": guests are served by non-local staff in establishments owned by non-locals whose income flows out of the region. The destination's role is reduced to providing the scene for this business and the question arises as to what benefit the local population actually gets from it. A strategy to solve this problem (other than the possibility of better remuneration for work in tourism so that it becomes more attractive for locals again) did not really emerge.



Zlatko Pepeonik at the Biokovo mountains, above Makarska, Croatia (Photo gratefully provided by Borna Fuerst Bjeliš)

### In Honor of Zlatko Pepeonik

The symposium was organized in commemoration of Zlatko Pepeonik's 20th death anniversary. Zlatko Pepeonik, born 1934 in Varaždin, was professor at the Department of Geography, Faculty of Science of the University of Zagreb, and an eminent Croatian geographer and tourism researcher. He taught also at Portland State University, Oregon, and the University of Texas, Austin. His research fields were tourism and the regional geography of Croatia, Northern Europe and North America, as well as demography and spatial planning. His close relations to Austrian geography are documented by his co-authorship of the issue "International Tourism Attractions in Central and Southeastern Europe" of the *Atlas of Eastern and Southeastern Europe*, edited by *Peter Jordan*, the author of this report, who had the privilege of regarding him as a good friend. It was also to his great pleasure to welcome *Valerija Kelemen-Pepeonik*, Zlatko's widow, who held a speech, as well as *Mirna Vučković-Pepeonik*, Zlatko's daughter, and her family.

### Participation

The symposium offered 31 lectures and two poster presentations from eight countries (Austria, Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Albania, India) and consisted of nine sessions in two parallel tracks after the introductory and keynote lectures. The initiator and main organizer, the Hermagor-based geographer *Peter Jordan*, (besides other research fields) a tourism geographer himself, expressed his deep satisfaction not only on the number and areal spread of participants as well as the excellent cooperation with all partners.<sup>1</sup>

### Sessions and Papers

The symposium kicked off with a general introduction to the topic and a presentation of some personal memories of Zlatko Pepeonik by *Peter Jordan*, some words of thanks presented by *Valerija Kelemen-Pepeonik*, and words of welcome offered by *Leopold Astner*, *Borna Fuerst-Bjeliš*, *Mladen Maradin*, *Hansjörg Brey*, and *Peter Mandl* on behalf of the main organizers. Then *Zoran Curić* (Department of Geography, Faculty of Science of the University of Zagreb / DG-FSUZ)

<sup>1</sup> Details on the numerous cooperation partners can be found in the event program, [www.sogde.org/site/assets/files/29584/invitation\\_and\\_program-1.pdf](http://www.sogde.org/site/assets/files/29584/invitation_and_program-1.pdf)

enlarged on personality and scientific merits of the outstanding Croatian tourism and regional geographer Zlatko Pepeonik. Concluding the opening session, *Markus Brandstätter*, head of the NLW Tourismus Marketing GmbH, Hermagor, drew a portrait of the wider tourism region, where the symposium took place, highlighting many recent initiatives, but also not concealing problems and questions on the current agenda. Besides the three keynote speeches addressed above, the symposium was composed of nine sessions in two parallel tracks.

**Session 1: Winter Sports Tourism**, chaired by *Borna Fuerst-Bjeliš*, saw two paper presentations. The first by *Amra Banda* (University of Sarajevo, Department of Geography), *Almir Peštek* (University of Sarajevo, School of Economics and Business), *Dženan Bećirović* (University of Sarajevo, Faculty of Forestry), and *Bakir Krajinović* (Federal Hydro-Meteorological Institute Sarajevo) on “Snowbound Dilemma – Are ski resorts in Southeast Europe adapting their tourism offerings to climate change?” The speakers arrived at the conclusion that ski resorts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia are usually to be found at low altitudes and therefore will have to orient themselves towards a diversification of their offer and year-round tourism. *Maruša Goluža*, *Katarina Polajnar Horvat*, *Aleš Smrekar*, and *Primož Pipan* (all Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Anton Melik Geographical Institute, Ljubljana) continued with “Challenges to be addressed for a sustainable transition of mountain ski resorts in the Alps – The case of Kranjska Gora”. Based on a workshop with 20 key stakeholders they identified demographic change as the most significant problem for future tourism development in this top tourist destination of Slovenia, located in a high Alpine region. With the population ageing, the future of this destination is at risk.

**Session 2: Tourism Marketing and Planning**, chaired by *Vuk Tvrтко Opačić* (DG-FSUZ), started with *Opačić* himself, *Zoran Klarić* (Institute for Tourism, Zagreb), and *Ivan Šulc* (both DG-FSUZ) asking the question “Tourism regions of UNWTO

– should they be changed after 50 years?” They concluded that especially as regards Central and Southeast Europe including the Alpine-Adriatic Region the United Nations World Tourism Organization’s (UNWTO) spatial organization scheme is to be adapted to current geopolitical and economic structures and tourism regionalization in relevant literature. *Tomislav Belovari* (DG-FSUZ) with his paper on “Spatial infrastructure implications of the EU IPARD program and projects in the Republic of Croatia – Focus on Istria County” examined which of the Croatian counties benefited most from the EU IPARD program<sup>2</sup> in the agricultural sector and found out that it is the county of Istria, Croatia’s most prosperous tourism region, and other economically better-off counties due to the fact that they are able to co-finance these projects. It was concluded that transfer payments by the state or an inter-county equalization mechanism would be necessary to put less prosperous counties in a position to afford this co-financing and to achieve regional disparity equalization.

**Session 3: Tourism and Culture**, chaired by *Eckehard Pistrick*, director of the new SOG-branch Klagenfurt, was opened by *Jadranka Brkić-Vejmelka* and *Ante Blaće* (both University of Zadar, Department of Teacher Education Studies in Gospić) together with *Ana Pejdo* (University of Zadar, Department of Geography) presenting on “Reading old travelogues for better understanding the tourism development in the littoral Croatia today” and depicting by literature from the second half of the 18th century to the first half of 20th century first traces of tourism development not only at the seaside but also in hidden corners of the hinterland. It was also interesting to see the travelogues writers’ (domestic and foreign) perceptions of littoral Croatia at the beginning of tourism development. *Sanja Dolenc* (Juraj Dobrila University of Pula) then presented on the politically sensitive issue of “Collective memory as a resource for developing dark tourism – The anti-fascist heritage in Istria County”, especially in a multiethnic and border region such as Istria (Istarska županija). She revealed that these memories are partly divided but was convinced

2 EU pre-accession assistance for rural development, [https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/international/international-cooperation/enlargement/pre-accession-assistance/overview\\_de](https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/international/international-cooperation/enlargement/pre-accession-assistance/overview_de)

that they, as well as material heritage, can be used to remind future generations in the county of the historical events and promote anti-fascism values in the local community.

In his paper “Visitor perspective of arts festivals in Croatia”, *Ives Vodanović Lukić* (Institute of Tourism, Zagreb) impressively demonstrated how small art festivals based on local artists and cultural heritage may promote tourism in general, using the example of five villages in Croatia: By being supported and promoted by institutions of the wider region, they can shape and enhance the image of a place, initiate an emotional relation between visitors and the location. *Ivana Žafran* (DG-FSUZ) examined the effects of tourism development on local communities with the example of the Municipality of Rakovica near the Plitvice Lakes National Park. This area boasts the highest number of visitors and concentration of accommodation capacities in the region and about a third of the local population employed in tourism activities and services, and is thus extremely dependent on tourism. Her survey conducted with the local population revealed a certain gap between participants directly involved and those not involved in tourism. Her research results may provide a basis for a better steering of tourism development and the inclusion of the local community.

**Session 4: Culinary Tourism**, chaired by *Miha Koderman*, started with a paper by *Radmila Jovanović* (Institute of Agricultural Economics, Belgrade; University of Malaga) and *Emilija Manić* (University of Belgrade, Faculty of Economy and Business) on “Wine tourism development and vineyard areas transformation – Comparative analysis of the former Yugoslav regions Šumadija and Slavonija” in absence of the authors and presented by *Jelena Lončar*. It demonstrated that these traditional wine-growing areas still have wine production but have been economically transformed. While perceived as a potential for tourism and regional development, wine tourism is just in its infancy. *Simon Kerma* (University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies, Koper-Capodistria) and *Barbara Lampič* (University of Ljubljana, Department of Geography) continued with an “Assessment of the vitality of Slovenian wine tourism routes and their development

potential”. Such routes were initiated in the first half of the 1990s as a national project regarding them an important factor in rural development. But the initiative has never taken off to the extent envisaged due to poor coordination between municipalities, lack of state support and inability to cooperate. The study presented by the paper investigated the reasons for this failure of addressing the potential for revitalization.

*Elena Kuprešak, Aleksandar Lukić, and Petra Radeljak Kaufmann* (all DG-FSUZ) highlighted another branch of Mediterranean culinary tourism with their presentation “Oleotourism development in Istria County (Croatia) and its spatial variations”. Olive growing in Istria represents 37 percent of all agricultural entities and is thus a dominant factor of the cultural landscape shaping the Mediterranean image of Istria. It is already a tourist attraction but could be more specifically used for culinary tourism. The paper presented a study of statistical methods defining five different clusters (types) of oleotourism areas in Istria.

**Session 5: Mountain Tourism**, chaired by *Peter Mandl*, was opened by the remote presentation by *Bhanwar Vishvendra Raj Singh* (Department of Geography, Mohanlal Sukhadia University Udaipur, India) on “Impact of climate change on tourism in mountainous regions – A comparative case study of Venice, Italy, and Udaipur City, India”. While both cities are part of a mountainous region only in the widest sense, they are comparable in the eminent role of water for their cityscapes – Udaipur due to its picturesque lakes and palaces is known as the ‘Venice of the East’. The comparative analysis highlighted the various ways in which climate change affects tourism. While Venice combats aquatic challenges, Udaipur faces terrestrial ones, both resulting in adverse effects on their tourism. The study underscored the need for region-specific climate adaptation strategies to sustain tourism and protect the livelihoods dependent on it.

*Sabrina Meneghello, Massimo Triches, and Laura Fregolito* (all IUAV University of Venice) continued with “Defining mountain living ‘from below’ – Two case studies from the Italian Dolomites” addressing living in the mountains,

ranging from permanent to the various forms of temporary residence. The two case studies compared the municipalities Cibiana and Selva di Cadore in the Veneto Region (Regione del Veneto/Vèneto). The implementation of a shared reflection and the future creation of a digital documentation center for the promotion of local heritage were proposed as ways to support resilient processes of co-construction and renewal of territorial values “from below”.

*Slaven Gašparović* (DG-FSUZ) in his paper on “Transport disadvantage and tourism – The example of the mountainous region of Croatia” focused on public transport in rural and remote areas as a means of tourism development and highlighted mountainous regions of Croatia as specifically disadvantaged in this respect. He analyzed the development of public transport in these regions, its timetables and connectivity and concluded by stating that the mountainous region of Croatia is characterized by a spatially poorly developed public transport network. Tourists mainly rely on private cars.

*Miha Koderman* (Koper-Capodistria) and *Quentin Benoît Guillaume Drouet* (University of Savoie Mont-Blanc, Research Unit EDYTEM) then presented a “Spatial analysis of the recent development of second homes in the municipality of Kranjska Gora, Slovenia”, one of the leading second-home destinations in Slovenia. They documented significant growth and internationalization of second homes since the COVID-19 pandemic and examined the spatial patterns of second homes as well as their impact on the landscape, also asking how changes in real estate development affect the permanent local population. *Matej Gabrovec* and *Irena Mrak* (both Slovenian Academy of Sciences, Anton Melik Geographical Institute, Ljubljana) as well as *Jernej Tiran* (Faculty of Environmental Protection, Velenje) concluded the session by presenting on “Re-use of mountain paths from alpine valleys to summits”. Highlighting the partial overcrowding of some hiking trails and a congestion of hikers on some prominent mountain peaks in the Slovenian Alps, they proposed to draw the attention of hikers on both alternative destinations and alternative trails to these destinations, on attractions along lower sections of mountain trails frequently only passed by car up to an alpine pasture or shelter hut, as

well as using digital maps and other means of communication.

**Session 6: Education, Instruction**, chaired by *Slaven Gašparović*, comprised Albina Sinani's paper (“Eqrem Çabej” Department of History, Anthropology and Geography, University of Gjirokastra, Albania) on “Education on climate change and environmental protection at the University of Gjirokastra and forms of their inclusion in the current curriculum”. In her presentation she highlighted on the one hand the importance of education on climate change demonstrating the methods applied in this field by her university, on the other hand the significant expansion of nature protection areas in southern Albania by establishing national parks and other forms of nature protection and the background of this recent development.

**Session 7: Urban Tourism, Geopolitics, and Tourism**, chaired by *Hansjörg Brey*, member of the managing board of the SOG, started with *Teodor Macan* and *Vedran Prelogović* (both DG-FSUZ) presenting on “First signs of tourism gentrification in the urban region of Pula”. They reported that in the urban region of Pula between 2001 and 2021 the total number of second homes had tripled, while their share of the total housing stock increased from 27.8 percent in 2001 to 40.8 percent in 2021. Furthermore, a spatial expansion of tourism activities from the narrow coastal strip towards the rural hinterland has been observed, where tourist accommodation is dominated by second homes. Between the censuses of 2011 and 2021, the total number of inhabitants in the urban region decreased for the first time since the late 1940s. *Jelena Lončar* and *Zoran Stiperski* (both DG-FSUZ) then talked on “Geopolitics and tourism – Is Kosovo a safe tourist destination?” Based on a survey (N=130) among students of undergraduate and graduate studies of geography at the University of Zagreb and drawing lessons from other politically disputed and crisis areas, they arrived at the conclusion that the uncertain geopolitical situation, internal conflict and legal insecurity reduced attractiveness for tourists as well as for potential investors into tourism infrastructure.





The participants of the symposium in front of the hotel "Carinzia" in Tröpolach (Photo: Hans Jost)

**Session 8: Coastal Tourism**, chaired by *Peter Jordan*, started with *Mladen Maradin*, *Fran Faber*, *Petra Bandov*, and *Fran Topalušić*, (all DG-FSUZ) presenting on "The impact of high temperatures on the development of summer tourism on the Croatian coast". Reporting on the effects of higher summer air temperatures on the behavior of tourists (stronger sensitivity of older age groups, avoiding the beach between 12 and 3 p.m., shifting to June and September for vacations) they concluded that natural shade near the beach will become more important. Furthermore, smoothing of the seasonal peak in tourism frequency will be a major consequence. *Ivan Šulc* and *Borna Fuerst-Bjeliš* (both DG-FSUZ) highlighted the "Post-pandemic recovery of tourism in Croatia in the Mediterranean context", pointing out that in comparison with other Mediterranean countries, Croatia enjoyed a very quick recovery. Already in 2021, the second year of the pandemic, tourism frequency recovered to close to normal. This can be explained by the proximity of the major generating markets and private cars as the main means of approaching Croatia as well as by the substitution of flights to overseas and other distant destinations with those to be approached with less health risks by car during the pandemic.

The study documented also a full restoration of spatial tourism patterns after the pandemic. *Ante Blaće* (University of Zadar, Department of Geography), *Jadranka Brkić-Vejmelka*, and *Ana Pejdo*

(both University of Zadar, Department of Teacher Education Studies in Gospić) hinted at "Factors influencing the development of rural tourism – A littoral Croatia case study". The case study referred to Ravni Kotari, a rural hinterland region in northern Dalmatia (Sjeverna Dalmacija), and confirmed that despite numerous efforts already made during the communist period to involve rural hinterlands into tourism at the coast (e.g. agrotourism), tourism remained concentrated on a narrow coastal strip. This is – also based on the reporter's own studies on the Kvarner islands – mainly due to the fact that potential local investors in the hinterland prefer to invest not in their own villages, but at the coast, where they can expect higher revenues. Thus, already the first village behind the coast (of the mainland, but also of larger islands like Krk) rather suffers from tourism on the coast than benefits from it.

**Session 9: Tourism and Nature Protection**, chaired by *Jelena Lončar* (DG-FSUZ), was opened by a paper by *Judith Pizzera* (University of Graz, Department of Geography), *David Osebik*, and *Johannes Terler* (both Pilm, Graz) on "Co-operative tourism development in destinations with large protected areas balancing protection and economic valorization", illustrating the participatory process of the "Nature Conservation/Tourism" forum. This was set up in the Hohe Tauern National Park in March 2024. Representatives from nature conservation associations, tourism, and science took part, addressing

areas of tension, mutual mistrust and communication barriers, but also the common understanding of the stakeholders and those responsible in this field with the aim to provide a common basis for successful nature tourism in the field of tension between economic valorization and consistent nature conservation. *Monika Auinger* and *Michael Jungmeier* (both Carinthia University of Applied Sciences, UNESCO Chair on Sustainable Management of Conservation Areas, Villach) as well as *Kathrin Hilgarter* (Carinthia University of Applied Sciences, Research group: Sustainable Innovation Research & Development, Villach) continued with their presentation "'expedition.nationalpark.2023' – Heiligenblut am Grossglockner: Rethinking tourism", reporting on the second of a three-day exchange and impulse format led by the Carinthia University of Applied Science in cooperation with the Hohe Tauern National Park Carinthia. The transdisciplinary research format, with a group of local actors and scientists, guided by a national park ranger and a research assistant, examined the tension between nature conservation and tourism in the national park

municipality of Heiligenblut at Grossglockner mountain in Austria.

Two posters were exposed in the break room and explained during the coffee breaks by their authors: *Marko Godinić* (Gospodarska škola Varaždin, Varaždin): "Changes in travelling patterns of the population of northern Croatia under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic", and *Adrijana Perkon* (University of Primorska, Faculty of Humanities, Department of Geography, Koper-Capodistria): "Valentin Stanič in spatial and temporal aspects".

### Reception and Dissemination

The symposium received also some local and regional attention by the participation of mayors and touristicians as well as reports in the regional media. Its papers will not be published in proceedings but are invited to be submitted to renown geographical journals such as the *Acta geographica slovenica*, the *Annals of the Austrian Geographical Society* (*Mitteilungen der Österreichischen Geographischen Gesellschaft*) and *Hrvatski geografski glasnik*.