

## SUSTAINABLE NATURAL AND CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM IN PROTECTED AREAS: CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

*From once common delta marshes, which were shaped into the saltpans, found near all the coastal towns of Slovenian Coast, there are only few coastal wetlands left. The concessionaire of Sečovlje Salina Nature Park is entitled to use the natural pans for traditional salt-making; in addition, under the laws and regulations the concessionaire is allowed to perform certain activities in the Park: management of the Park, development of sustainable tourism and the farming of aquatic organisms. This paper provides an overview of trends that affect the planning of tourism in protected areas, the growth and diversification of this niche market, and the potential benefits and risks of merging tourism with natural and cultural heritage. Through the content analysis of documents, the case study of planning for sustainable development in the protected area is examined: the sensitivity of development of infrastructure and services, tourism marketing and management challenges in a secure area, and tools for tourism management.*

**Key words:** Nature park positioning, saltpans, museum, sustainable tourism, cultural heritage, natural heritage, sustainable marketing, heritage marketing

## TURISMO SOSTENIBILE BASATO SUL PATRIMONIO NATURALE E CULTURALE NELLE AREE PROTETTE: STUDIO DI CASO

### SINTESI

*Delle zone paludose accanto alle foci dei corsi d'acqua, poi trasformate in saline, che un tempo esistevano in un numero maggiore accanto alle località costiere slovene, oggi ne rimangono solo alcune. Il curatore del Parco naturale delle saline di Sicciole ha il diritto di utilizzare le saline naturali per il tradizionale processo di estrazione del sale. Inoltre, ai sensi delle leggi e dei regolamenti applicabili, il curatore è autorizzato a svolgere nel Parco alcune attività: la gestione del Parco, lo sviluppo del turismo sostenibile e l'allevamento di organismi acquatici. Il presente testo fornisce un quadro delle tendenze che influiscono sulla pianificazione del turismo nelle aree protette, sulla crescita e la diversificazione di questo mercato di nicchia, e i potenziali benefici e rischi che accompagnano la fusione del turismo con il patrimonio naturale e culturale. Attraverso l'analisi dei documenti, viene esaminato lo studio di caso di pianificazione per lo sviluppo sostenibile dell'area protetta: la sensibilità dello sviluppo delle infrastrutture e dei servizi, le potenziali difficoltà del marketing e della gestione del turismo in una zona protetta, e gli strumenti necessari per la gestione del turismo.*

**Parole chiave:** posizionamento del parco naturale, saline, museo, turismo sostenibile, patrimonio culturale, patrimonio naturale, marketing sostenibile, marketing del patrimonio naturale e culturale

## INTRODUCTION

Sečovlje saltpans have been built and maintained by human efforts since before the rise of Venetian republic. The 650 ha saltpans of Sečovlje are located on the border with the Republic of Croatia, in the southern part of the municipality of Piran. The northern part of the Park, where there is on-going active salt production is called Lera. Strunjan and Sečovlje saltpans are the most northern pans in the Mediterranean and among the few pans where salt is still being produced using the traditional processes (Soline Pridelava soli, 2004a). In 1989, the municipality of Piran adopted a decree inaugurating the Sečovlje Salina Nature Park (SSNP); in 1999, the Park was transferred into state protection. Upon entering the EU, saltpans were included in the list of priority habitats (*Natura 2000*) and in 1993 the Park has been placed on the list of wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention (Beltram, 2005).

Since a natural link between tourism and heritage management can easily be established, over the last few years cultural heritage has been studied from a tourism perspective, implying that heritage has to be presented and promoted to tourists in order to be kept 'alive'. Studies have been conducted to identify problems and develop recommendations related to the semantic annotation of cultural heritage collections (see Schreiber et al., 2008), the use of multimedia and other 'technologies'. Some studies emphasize the role of pollution in maintaining cultural heritage (see Varotsos et al., 2009); however, little research is being done on natural heritage as cultural heritage. Saltpans constitute natural heritage as well as part of the cultural heritage of Slovenia. We can see them as a natural habitat for rare species as well as 'a means' to a balanced eco-system in the gulf of Sečovlje. Also, the way salt is 'produced', the rituals and traditions, items and language associated with saltpans can be seen in the light of cultural heritage.

The cultural heritage of SSNP represents hundreds of years (from 14<sup>th</sup> century) of life and work on the Adriatic coast, with ruins of old saltpans houses, abandoned and still functioning salt-fields, levees and channels with stone walls, bridges, wind pumps and other artefacts. This site reflects and provides testimonies for significant ethnological, technical, historical, settlement and landscape heritage. In the Sečovlje saltpans, the salt is still being produced "with the traditional procedures of the daily gathering of brine on the biosediment – the *petola*" (Soline Pridelava soli, 2004b).

Historically, the saltpans of Piran were very important. As Darovec (2001) reports, the distribution of salt resources has been of major importance for the economic as well as the political position of north-western part of Istria. Venetians were attracted by the quality of the Piran salt (from saltpans of Sečovlje), while the salt from Koper was mostly destined for export to the inner Slovenian

regions under the Habsburg monarchy. The trade in salt became one of the principal commercial areas, in which Venetian and Austrian spheres of influence coincided. Today, saltpans are silent witnesses of former flourishing economic activity and centuries of efforts by the Roman and Slovenian populations of Istria (Hieng, 2008).

The nearby city of Portorož became famous as a resort destination, the first forerunner of tourism in 13<sup>th</sup> century. At that time, Benedictine monks from St. Lawrence treated some diseases as rheumatism with seawater and slat mud from the nearby saltpans. Otherwise, Portorož became known as a resort town gradually and only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At that time they re-discovered the healing properties of mud and salt baths. The year 1885 is considered to be the official beginning of tourism in Portorož. Until then its primary importance was as an industrial city and not as a tourist centre. It is known that in the best years saltpans required up to 2000 season workers. (Brglez et al., 2005)

Romeril (1989) pointed to various possible effects that tourism industry can have on the environment. The scarcity of the natural resources that we use for tourism purposes reminds us that we have to exploit them in a sustainable manner, although the availability of visitors' free time is increasing, as well as appetites for development. Silberberg (1995) has highlighted a number of important building blocks constituting the attractiveness of the natural heritage: perceived product quality, awareness of visitors; views of visitors concerning services; sustainability; the degree of perceived uniqueness of the tourism product; ease of access; the involvement of the community and its positive attitude towards tourism; the dedication and ability of managers. McKercher, Ho and duCros (2005) investigated the links between tourism and cultural heritage management and highlighted the continuum rather than the widespread conflict paradigm, with the reflection of different maturity levels in the relationship between tourism and destination management. Lim and McAleer (2005) offered the detailed analysis of management practices and challenges for ecologically sustainable tourism. Leask and Yeoman (1999) have classified cultural heritage attractions in three categories: built, natural and living heritage; the Sečovlje saltpans paradigmatically represent all three categories. Bacon (1987) has assessed the potential use of wetlands for the purposes of diversification of the tourism industry. He presents an evaluation methodology for tourism use of wetlands: while the natural heritage also requires protection, through the methodology the various national environmental and socio-economic criteria for assessing the potential use of wetlands for tourism purposes are monitored. The wetland ecosystem conceals an unimaginable wealth of biodiversity that is very important for sustainable development. The United Nations World Tourism Organization in February 2010 signed a memorandum with the Ramsar Convention, which

should indicate a closer cooperation between the two organizations to work towards strengthening the role of wetlands and biodiversity of their ecosystems to develop sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2011). Coastland wetlands are very rich in natural habitat types and perform an exclusive role in the environment (Breg Valjavec, Polajnar Horvat, 2011).

Eagles, McCool and Haynes (2002) thought that the planning and management of sustainable tourism in protected areas should be guided so as to develop sustainable tourism from the perspective of local conditions and local communities. Another important aspect of resources and visitor management is keeping in mind that they also need to maintain the natural heritage area for the enjoyment of future visitors. The sustainable management of protected areas can contribute to the protection of natural heritage and avoid the danger of the destruction of natural beauty. Mihalič (2001) emphasizes the need for a relationship between tourism and the natural environment, coordinating the impact of tourism on the natural environment, as well as the importance of quality physical environment for tourism. The latter often tends to be ignored, even though they are equally important.

Xu, Wan and Yang (2007) noted that different types of wetlands should use different eco-tourism development models, which should be derived from an analysis of the historical and cultural backgrounds, the integrity of the ecosystem, the competitive market capacity and the regional economy. Zhang, Liu and Tong (2007) argue that we should stay alert to the various wetlands components: the different stakeholders in eco-tourism in the wetlands, the extent of the exploitation of eco-tourism in the wetlands and the monitoring of eco-tourism in the wetlands. Wang and Lu (2009) have raised important questions for future research to advance the study of eco-tourism development in wetlands and to provide a reference for the exploitation of resources, environmental protection and scientific administration of wetlands and related areas. Pan, Cui and Wu (2010) have evaluated the behaviour of visitors to the wetland park and noticed that it differs from tourist behaviour at the usual or eco-tourism destinations, especially with respect to perceptions of intensive wetland ecosystem functions and behaviours in relation to environmental effects.

In this paper, sustainable development is discussed in conjunction with the comprehensive protection of natural heritage and tourism development in the natural area, which itself requires extraordinary caution in the planning and realization of any changes and activities. The Slovenian Tourism Strategy 2002-2006 (Ministry of the Economy, 2002) proposed a tripartite internal division of the development of coastal eco-tourism within the saltpans (intensive tourist use of the band at Seča, protected activity in middle part of the salt production facility and a third completely protected part consisting of

the ex Dragonja river bed – Drnica channel). Within the analysis of the Development Plan and Policies of Slovene Tourism 2007 – 2011 (Ministry of the Economy, 2006) it has been acknowledged that “protected areas provide a source for the development of tourism products, while at the same time tourism represents a tool for nature conservation”.

The latest 2012-2016 tourism strategy (Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, 2012) represents a commitment to the vision that by 2016, tourism in Slovenia will be entirely based on sustainable development.

Primožič (2005) when examining the integration of heritage and tourism in Slovenia stresses the importance of promoting tourism in protected areas. On the basis of Leask and Yeoman (1995), the SSNP division can be classified as both natural and cultural heritage, reflecting the elements of the built and living heritage; a classification which combines the elements of the protection of biodiversity in the wetland with the natural environment that human work remodelled over the centuries and where the desalination on a traditional model is currently under way. Several Slovenian authors have researched important issues of sustainable tourism in protected areas, e.g. Jurinčič (2005) wrote about assessment of carrying capacity; Jurinčič, Bojnec & Bošković (2007) wrote on the management of natural parks for successful tourism development; Lebe (2008) about cultural heritage; Lebe & Milfelner (2006) on sustainable tourism; Lešnik Štuhec & Mumel (2010) on the sustainable marketing of protected areas; and Sovinc & Morgan (2003) about protected areas and their meaning for tourism.

The SSNP management has set out the following objectives: nature conservation, preservation of exceptional natural and cultural values, protection of indigenous, rare and endangered plant and animal species, natural ecosystems and the characteristics of inanimate nature and the preservation and care of the countryside. The Concessionaire shall exercise its right to use natural values of Sečovlje saltpans for traditional salt-making so as not to endanger biodiversity, to protect natural and cultural heritage and to preserve the ecosystem of the salt workings.

The SSNP is divided into three protected areas, namely Lera, Fontanigge and the Drnica channel. In Fontanigge, the area of strictest protection, economic activity is not allowed: this zone may be used to collect brine from which salt is then obtained at Lera, and for the production of salt in the museum complex. The Slovenian government decree declared Fontanigge to be a cultural monument of national importance; while the zone at Lera is an area of active salt production. The saltpans are managed by the concessionaire Soline Pridelava soli, d. o. o. (Salt Production Co., Ltd.), a company which has been bought in 2002 by the company Mobitel, d. d. from the company Droga Portorož, d. d., for the pur

pose of marketing promotion through the preservation of cultural and natural heritage. The granted concession shows the complex nature of the protected area, since it includes a triple rate concession for mining rights to exploit mineral resources, the protection of natural values and water management. The primary purpose of the concession contract is the conservation of biodiversity and sustainable use of the park; while the concessionaire is obliged to comply with all international treaties and legislation of the Republic of Slovenia. The concessionaire may carry out other activities such as tourism, mariculture and moorings for rent, but these must not threaten biological diversity and must offer protection of the natural and cultural heritage (SSNP, 2011).

Within SSNP the Museum of Salt also operates, which is managed by the Sergej Mašera Maritime Museum of Piran. The museum complex consists of three restored salt workers' houses and comprises its own saltpan field and Giassi channel; inside the museum it is possible to view a collection of tools and the ancient method of salt production stemming from the 14 century, the salt-worker's family flat on the first floor, ground floor warehouse and restored bread oven (Sergej Mašera Maritime Museum Piran, 2011). Since 2012, a joint ticket has been available allowing the museum and saltpan attractions to be visited together.

### METHODOLOGY

A review of literature on the topic of sustainable integration of cultural and natural heritage in tourism development plans is needed for the consideration of the initial thinking about the role and use of heritage protection. The following methods have been used: documentary analysis of scientific papers and documents, descriptive analysis case study (Yin, 1994) and comparison method. Based on the findings, possible actions for the planning of sustainable tourism development strategies in the Sečovlje salt pans have been suggested. Because of the specific features the place of study presents, it cannot serve as a general model for the sustainable development of tourism in protected areas. It nevertheless offers an interesting insight into the processes of operational planning and the execution of strategies for the interested publics.

### TOURISM PLANNING INSIDE PROTECTED AREAS

Each protected area needs a plan, in which the management of tourism and related developments is described. The plan outlines the desired future state and the most effective and acceptable way to reach this goal. The plan includes detailed specific objectives that are determined on the basis of the founding acts of the area, describes the objectives of tourism development and identifies the management actions, budget, financing

and zoning, all of which are necessary to achieve the objectives (Eagles, McCool, Haynes, 2002). The park management is aware that in order to realize the long-term management goals of the SSNP it is of great importance to enable and maintain the system of zoning with clearly defined protection regimes and an effective system of management of protected areas, corresponding to international standards.

The annual plans of the SSNP follow the 10-year management plan; the most significant management units are (Sovinc, 2005): water regime, habitats and species, infrastructure, cultural heritage, visiting and interpretation, inspection service, research and monitoring, promotion and public information, salt production, tourism, water management, agriculture, mariculture, other activities, administrative work and staff, staff training, documentation service, fundraising, projects, international cooperation and commitment. Unlike other protected areas of national importance, the management of the SSNP has been awarded by means of a concession to a company; a public institution has not been established. The business model as the operator of the protected area could represent a great advantage in order to provide financial and human resource management for park. Alternatively, it represents a risk if there is a change in the enterprise management relationship in terms of the maintenance of the natural and cultural heritage.

The action plan for sustainable tourism development of South Primorska 2006 - 2012 (RDC Koper, 2006) provides a fundamental developmental orientation as »the redirection from intensive tourism development to sustainable development by raising the quality of existing products, with the gradual implementation of sustainable principles.«

Du Cross (2001) noted that mass tourism on the heritage site without attention to conservation management could lead to the physical and intangible damage of its cultural heritage values. Urry (1990) and Daniel (1996) warned that the provision of entertainment should not detract from the historical cultural significance of the place. The authors however warn against a diametric view, in which any commoditization of a heritage site is understood as a destructive attempt (i.e. Hovinen, 1995; Fyall, Garrod, 1996). At natural sites with limited resources, as it is the case with the SSNP, tourism strategies should be planned in which visitors are concentrated. Dispersal strategies should be avoided if there are not enough resources available for implementing educational campaigns and regulatory controls (Pedersen, 2002).

McIntosh & Prentice (1999, 608) analysed cultural heritage tourism experiences and found out that there are several dimensions that should be considered. These include "affective as well as cognitive benefits as responses to cultural heritage tourism settings and a stronger emphasis on the personal dimensions of visiting". It is important to obtain an insight into the knowledge, thoughts,

emotions and expectations of different groups of park visitors, as every visitor has to encode the experience of visit within his / her personal terms of reference.

### SENSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE AND SERVICES

Movement within the SSNP is limited due to protection constraints; this to some extent reduces the accessibility of the park and museum. The museum involves 3 km of walking distance; with high summer temperatures or bad weather, this reduces the visit. Alternatively, it is possible to access the museum by waterway; but it also depends on the weather – at low tides or windy weather, access is disabled. Transport costs are relatively high; the entrance fee to the museum has risen more than twice (Faganel, Bratina, 2008). The company Soline Pridelava soli, d. o. o. ensures the effective allocation of resources: more than 40 employees, most of them salt workers, water keepers and maintenance personnel, help to ensure the effective implementation of key activities to maintain the water system, which is essential in maintaining a saline ecosystem in the traditional way (Sovinc, 2005). Major groups of stakeholders identified within the park consist as follows: employees in the park and museum; museum and park management; ornithologists; biologists; ethnologists; photography enthusiasts; artists; environmentalists; sportspeople, a heterogeneous group of visitors including tourists, academic groups, and student research teams. The interests of individual groups are not always compatible, but the need for coexistence is recognized.

The Museum of Salt-making has no electricity – something that also limits the level and schedule of visits – but changes have to be planned very carefully because they could leave a strong impact on cultural heritage. Some years ago, the area was subject to crude intervention through the building of the main access road and administrative buildings, which greatly increased the level of visits as well as the looting of heritage until the protected area could be established. The Park has to co-exist with and help to coordinate the business expansion plans of the neighbouring Portorož international airport in their aim to extend the airport runway.

In 2010, SSNP gained the designation »MANSALT - Man and nature in Sečovelje pans« in the context of European Call LIFE + Nature and Biodiversity, resulting in EUR 7 million in funding. The funds will be primarily aimed at the reconstruction of inoperative dams, which are the main cause of the periodic flooding, and for the control of water regimes to maintain biodiversity. The remaining project objectives are the restoration of some degraded areas, increasing the awareness of the importance of traditional salt-making for the conservation of nature and facilitating the sustainable development of local communities and presenting a model of good practice in the

use of traditional methods of salt production in the reconstruction of ecosystems. Over the next five years, by means of the LIFE + in the Sečovelje saltpans, 6255 m of channel embankments and 1580 m of dam fronts will be restored, as well as the restoration of 8 ha of freshwater wetlands that provide a habitat for endangered European pond turtles (*Emys orbicularis*). The project will aim to raise the public awareness of the problem by organizing informational and educational workshops, the filming of two short movies and an online 'reality show' that will be established to monitor the current state of the terns (*Sterna albifrons*) nesting colonies (Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, 2010).

In 2010, the municipality of Piran accepted the proposal for a detailed spatial plan for the 13.4 ha brownfield site of the abandoned coal mine in Sečovelje adjacent to that of SSNP. Mobitel, d. d. is the landowner and the sponsor of spatial plan. The development plan has been designed in order to integrate the tourism and cultural heritage. In the area of the coal mine they propose to place the reception centre and parking for Sečovelje saltpans, and to build a small hotel. They plan to build the hotel spa, which would use mud and salt brine. In addition to the planned museum park resort, the former railway station building would be preserved and used to locate the Parenzana museum. In the mining tower they would establish the old mine museum; on the first floor the saltpans museum and art gallery would be located, and on the top the viewing platform. (Delo, 15. 6. 2010, 12)

The tourism development strategy for the municipality of Piran (2009-2015) identified eco-tourism and the integration of eco-tourism and cultural products in the coast hinterland as one of primary competitive advantages of the Piran/Portorož destination (Municipality of Piran, 2009). Infrastructure development within a sustainable tourism industry is in principle the primary responsibility of the public sector; for example, the design and construction of roads, airports and sewage systems. The role of the public sector is of particular importance in determining the protected areas, parks and reserves. Since the SSNP is under corporate management, insistence on maintaining a sustainable mode of investment in space is even more crucial, since this park is especially significant for the development of the public profile and credibility of the parent company. Therefore, the concessionaire should proceed in an extremely cautious manner when trying to increase awareness of the important issues and promote the sustainable behaviour of visitors, as they understand very well the connection between the concessionaire and Mobitel, d. d.. It is good if the access rules (pollution, fire, noise) are made available and visitors are familiarised with their contents because inappropriate behaviour can also be caused by ignorance or the lack of awareness of some visitors.

Within the REVITAS project - Revitalization of and tourism in the Istrian hinterland (bilateral European project

between Slovenia and neighbouring Croatia), workshops and seminars, lectures, and study tours were conducted in May 2011 in selected locations of the cultural heritage of Istria; among others, they have visited the SSNP and the salt festival. Such events inform and educate the local population as well as the wider region and are important as a means of raising awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism development and heritage conservation.

The cultural heritage of the SSNP attracts many artists. Sovinc (2011b): "Each year, their work is exhibited in Lera as part of the Lera Genius Loci event. Hundreds of visitors enjoy the combination of historical heritage and contemporary artworks in this exhibition. The artists involved include painters, photographers, dancers, singers and poets".

The following goals have been determined for the further management of the SSNP (Sovinc, 2011a): preservation of natural values, species, habitat types and landscape; facilitation of the experience of and learning about the park; contribution to achieving the objectives of public interest in other fields.

When discussing different investment and exploitation opportunities inside a wetland area it is of the utmost importance to explore the impact upon different wetland structures and functions and to consider the dynamics of development plans in the constructed ecosystem. This is necessary to provide a better understanding of the processes involved. In order to control these impacts at the SSNP, it would be wise to plan the management of identified challenges of sustainable tourism development, taking care of environment and conservation.

#### MANAGING THE CHALLENGES OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PROTECTED AREAS

To provide a proper marketing development strategy, a short SWOT analysis has been carried out for the protected area of SSNP. The following *strengths* can be assessed: place uniqueness; great location; rich cultural, natural and historical heritage; possibility of continued development; tradition; nearby tourist centres; fango medical treatment; recognised brands (Solnce, Lepa Vida); clean environment; and protected status. *Weaknesses*: insufficient tourist offer; no webshop for products; high maintenance costs; decay of park's infrastructure; inefficient use of some spaces; noise from airport; lack of experienced salt workers; seasonality; insufficient collaboration with tourism subjects; and lack of funding. *Opportunities*: special tourist products; no local competition; increase of visitor numbers; changes of visitor structures; increase of jobs; growth of environmental awareness and healthy lifestyle; demanding tourists willing to pay for the unique experiences; programmes for every season. *Threats*: lack of dedicated salt workers and committed staff; political, economic and professional li-

mitations for the restoration of saltpans; loss of interest of the concessionaire; lack of overnight stay possibilities inside the park; inefficient marketing communication; lack of innovative approaches.

Answering our research question, we can assert on the basis of positive features in the presented case study that it is very likely that heritage protection and heritage tourism can coexist together inside protected area. The aim of the establishment of the park is biodiversity conservation, protection of cultural and natural heritage and support for sustainable development. Furthermore, it is also evident that carefully planned sustainable marketing can contribute an important source of added value for different stakeholders, involved in protecting, visiting or managing the protected area. When talking about the positioning of heritage inside the protected site in terms of sustainable marketing, certain "prescriptions" have to be taken into consideration.

A positioning strategy refers to the image of the service, which we want to evoke in the minds of the selected target market segment. Sustainability-conscious lovers of natural and cultural heritage, who enjoy spending their free time inside a protected area, are a very specific target group. Additionally, there are plenty of subgroups: for each of them the optimal strategy must be prepared. The tool for planning and carrying out these strategies is called the marketing mix; four interdependent P's for products and 7 P's for services. Following are the seven P's for cultural and natural heritage park services that reflect the potential of the park in terms of a sustainable paradigm.

The *Product (service)* is the high quality site, representing the built, natural and living heritage that has to remain intact for future generations, drawing from historical and cultural roots. This must be the guideline for all the services that are provided inside the park. *Place* is the park itself, the number of tourists has to be carefully planned and the zoning has to be strictly maintained also in order to separate different target groups of visitors (e.g. birdwatchers, biologists). The *Price* level of entrance tickets has to remain accessible. Other sources are more important, such as the salt that is produced and sold together with other connected products. *Promotion* is very important; a better web site with more interactive approach would be advisable. Not to forget the educational role that has to be maintained throughout informative and educative promotion if sustainable tourism is to be developed. *Physical evidences* are the park itself, facilities, brochures, staff uniforms, etc. and they are the key element in connecting and emphasizing the intangible aspects of the service that are forming the image of the service in the minds of the stakeholders. As *People* are meant firstly two main groups of stakeholders: service providers and visitors. The level of staff training, knowledge of foreign languages, kindness, empathy, etc. are attributes that are all of determinate value. Visitors of

the park have to be informed, instructed and educated to behave as the rules of the park stipulate. For all other groups of stakeholders, specific strategies have to be additionally prepared. *Processing* is about the implementation of service; here the actual contact is realized between providers and visitors. All the contact points have to be identified, carefully designed in an involving way to amplify the experience.

Besides the seven P's that are well-known from marketing theory and practice, at least one C is also very important – *Customers* and their changing needs, placed into a specific micro and macro environment. The existing positioning of the product has to be constantly challenged through the monitoring of technologies, legal, economic and other environments, used to display possible scenarios for the future.

We are also here presenting an improved interpretation of the Belz and Peattie's (2009) model, elaborating the work of Stoiber (2010) and Bouhana (2010), in which the 8 C's of sustainability branding was developed. It might be very important for the sustainable positioning of natural and cultural heritage: Core, Co-operative, Credible, Consumer benefits, Conversational, Consistency, Commitment, and Continuity. *Core* represents the beginning of credible sustainability marketing as the socio-ecological impacts of products connecting sustainability: in terms of the key problems and the core business, it is essential to ensure that they are congruent with target consumers. Promoting the experiencing of intact natural and cultural heritage to target visitors has to be the prime goal for any effective brand sustainability strategy. *Co-operation* with numerous stakeholders in the process of innovating and marketing sustainable products and services is required to solve socio-ecological problems associated with the product; that is, the natural and cultural heritage. *To be credible in the eyes of visitors, partners have to be trustworthy: independent designations awarded can help to further build credibility. Consumer benefits are usually broader, beyond the socio-ecological attributes, including health, safety, symbolism, status, etc., also taking into account diversity of visitor groups. The effectiveness of sustainability branding increases when it is a two-way conversation, so visitors and other stakeholders should be invited to participate in a conversation about the sustainability process in order to intensify the brand-consumer relationship. If sustainability is the key to brand positioning, it is important to communicate it to consumers in a consistent way, integrating all the elements of the marketing communication mix. In doing so it should not be forgotten that sites and company's environmental and social performance should be congruent with the image displayed or the desired competitive positioning. The Commitment of top management and employees is crucial for effective sustainable marketing. Continuity: sustainability has to be planned and performed in the long term to deliver the brand promise.*

Of course other C's could be added to this model, as Belz and Peattie (2010) further suggested, such as Clarity: sustainability includes many complex issues and employees should discuss these through seminars, speeches, newsletters, open discussions, internal prize competitions, etc., but it could be argued that clarity is already included inside the Conversational C.

The tourism industry utilizes environmental resources as the manufacturing material that acts as the most important ingredient for the locality attraction. The characteristics of the historical development of the tourism sector should be studied in terms of its economic role and the pressure it exerted on the environment. Modifications of tourists' activities, spontaneous market trends and their evaluation in the light of unbearable social and environmental indicators ought to be analysed. It would be wise to take an initial decision based on a simultaneous consideration of the location's environment and development potential. The broad environmental consideration could be viewed in terms of an opportunity rather than as a constraint; usually we agree that the segmentation of problems is the key to their solution, but the construction of a focused view and shared vision is facilitated by the existence of conflicting functions between them.

The managers of the SSNP have to pursue the continuation of dialogue with all the evidenced stakeholders in order to maintain the highest possible level of site protection awareness. Every opportunity should be taken to advocate the support for effective legislation and provision of financing resources. Education about environment protection and conservation has to be planned and offered in a non-intrusive manner at every established contact with stakeholders. A proactive sustainable management plan has to be prepared for the placement of tourism activities inside the protected area, implementing a diverse range of initiatives. Some minor but nevertheless important points in order to manage tourists flow could also be considered: e.g. to recommend a visit outside the peak; or a visit to other locations; an increase of the ticket price; a ban on visits at sensitive times; a ban on visits to sensitive areas; protection of sensitive areas from impact; acquaintance of visitors with the fundamentals of ethical behaviour.

The Sečovlje salt pans have already been temporary listed as a potential UNESCO world heritage location and according to Sovinc (STA, 2011), being part of the World Heritage List, as surveys show, could increase the number of visitors by some 30%. We strongly believe that the answer to our research question is yes: it is possible to integrate the protection of natural and cultural heritage inside the protected areas with heritage tourism, especially and exclusively through careful sustainable marketing positioning for selected target visitors. Through our case study, analysis and discussion based on theoretical and empirical findings it has been shown



**Fig. 1: Sečovlje salt pans (photo: A. Faganel).**  
**Sl. 1: Sečoveljske soline (foto: A. Faganel).**

that the coexistence of sustainable tourism and heritage protection is possible; but only if we educate interested and knowledgeable stakeholders, in which the proposed positioning of the heritage site has been accepted and internalised.

### CONCLUSION

We agree with Schroeder-Esch (2006), who refuses the constructivist view of inheritance, i.e. "Heritage as a place where such heritage is traced in the importance of material artefacts". It should rather be seen as a way of heritage interpretation and a representation of the world we live in and that this is a sphere in which we can actively participate. Accordingly, such a view of a combination of certain heritage elements of the past, which can be termed as important for the present, should be preserved and kept alive for the future. Protection and preservation of cultural heritage has become an impor-

tant resource for sustainable tourist use of cultural and natural sites; while it is necessary to consider the protection and conservation of these areas and their economic development. Traces of salt-making culture are reflected in the unique cultural, natural, technical, ethnological and historical heritage. Škornik (2008) points out that the economic importance of salt is combined with its environmental and cultural value; produced salt is sought after as a quality food and a tourist souvenir; the preservation of traditional festivities such as the Saltpan workers' festival (slo. *Solinarski praznik*) evokes an awareness of cultural heritage; the protected area provides a habitat for endangered plants and animals, but it also offers an ecologically pristine living environment for visitors. The SSNP is an example of good cooperation between an IT company and various stakeholders in joining to preserve the unique and endangered wetlands. The proximity to the tourist centre offers good opportunities for further development of cultural and ecological tourism, which

could include the provision of additional funding opportunities to preserve the valuable heritage. It has been presented how managers of protected areas have to understand the needs of their existing and potential visitors; it is also vital to adopt a service-oriented approach, i.e. a concern for satisfaction of all the involved stakeholders and visitors; while they should be aware that tourism in the park depends on the quality of natural and cultural resources in the protected area.

It is an extremely interesting case study as the Park is managed by a private company, without official public staff. Protected areas are usually under the management of public institutions, financed with government funds. In 2009 managers of protected areas in Slovenia retrieved only 52 % of their income from government; the rest came from other sources (Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, 2011). Harsh economic conditions, recession and the financial crisis that has been in place since 2008 requires a consideration of the revised role of the state and the public good. Sources of funding that we were made aware of in the SSNP include: entrance fees, public funds, sponsorship projects, the concessionaire with a vision of the location's sustainable development, public-private partnerships, national and European research projects, production and sale of traditional products, sale of promotional products. There is also a risk of loss of interest of private entities, changes in private company's policy priorities; however, the distribution of resources can guarantee a certain degree of funding security. Tourist visits have to be monitored and managed. Specific methods and established good practice can also be used in cases of other protected areas. Having the desire to source income from sustainable tourism, it is important to ensure the scope and the level of impact of tourism on the protected area, which is still acceptable; mass tourism is not desirable. As Middleton and Hawkins (1998) asserted, a modern tourism industry is well-suited to facilitating and enhancing the environmental quality of destinations and of communicating and educating visitors and residents regarding its importance for the conservation of heritage and changing consumer behaviour and business models.

Olsson, Folke and Hahn (2004) analysed the emergence of an adaptive co-management system for wet-

land landscape governance and established that social transformation represents the key to move from a less desired trajectory to one where the capacity to manage ecosystems sustainably for human well-being is strengthened. It is a fact that wetlands as alternative tourism products provide people with numerous advantages in tourism with spectacular natural and cultural landscapes.

Regarding our case study, instead of building more infrastructure, now is the turn of storytelling and the development of a boutique offer. Slovenian tourism is extremely heterogeneous: mass tourism, congress tourism, sports tourism and other forms should coexist with natural and cultural heritage tourism. Lowenthal (2005) reminded us that we receive collective legacies from two sources: "the natural environment and the creations of human beings". Civilization leaves deep impacts on nature and environment changes artefacts, so we have to keep in our minds that both types of inheritances commingle and plan a distinctive offer of revitalised cultural heritage to make it available for potential visitors.

When assessing the contribution of this paper to the past studies, it should be emphasized that it is a specific case study, trying to expose interesting issues in a protected site-based sustainable form of tourism. It has been demonstrated that an appropriate marketing positioning, proceeding according to the developed sustainability strategy, is the main key to the integration of natural and cultural heritage inside protected areas alongside the heritage tourism.

Recommendations for further research: it would prove relevant and interesting if implications from this case study could be opened up for comparison to broader/global situations. Various visitors segments' preferences and expectations are also worth being analysed and compared with the management's view of the diversified products and services offered, to identify factors causing possible perception gaps. Another interesting set of issues would be to study how sustainable marketing activities and innovative destination branding influence visitors' perceptions, motives, behaviour, and environmental consciousness.

## TRAJNOSTNI NARAVNI IN KULTURNI DEDIŠČINSKI TURIZEM NA ZAŠČITENIH OBMOČJIH: ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA

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### POVZETEK

Sečoveljske soline predstavljajo naravno antropogeno mokrišče, ki so ga skozi stoletja sooblikovale človeške roke. Krajinski park Sečoveljske soline (KPSS) je bil ustanovljen leta 1989 in Republika Slovenija je prevzela pokroviteljstvo nad njim. Slovenija se je zavezala k spoštovanju Barcelonske konvencije ter Konvencije o biološki diverziteti. Trajnostni razvoj solin obravnavamo v povezavi s celovito zaščito te naravne in kulturne dediščine, kakor tudi turistični razvoj znotraj naravnega okolja, ki že samo po sebi zahteva posebno previdnost pri načrtovanju in uresničevanju kakršnihkoli sprememb in dejavnosti. Predstavljeni so bili nekateri družbeni, naravni in kulturno dediščinski vidiki trajnostnega razvoja destinacije. KPSS lahko klasificiramo kot naravno in kulturno dediščino, ki odseva elemente grajene in žive dediščine, s prepletanjem elementov zaščite biotske raznovrstnosti mokrišča; naravno okolje, ki ga je človeško delo skozi stoletja preoblikovalo in kjer še vedno poteka pridobivanje soli na tradicionalen način.

Pregled literature s področja trajnostnega vključevanja kulturne in naravne dediščine v turistične razvojne načrte je potreben zaradi začetnega razmisleka o vlogi in rabi zaščite dediščine. Namen študije primera je predstaviti strukturiran način razmišljanja o vplivih trajnostnega turizma, izpostaviti vprašanja glede ohranjanja dediščine ter za vzpostavitev zavedanja o pomenu dediščinskega marketinga. Glavno raziskovalno vprašanje raziskave je: »Ali se da integrirati zaščito naravne in kulturne dediščine znotraj zaščitenih področij z dediščinskim turizmom, s pomočjo trajnostnega marketinškega pozicioniranja?« Uporabljene so bile naslednje raziskovalne metode: dokumentacijska analiza znanstvenih člankov in besedil, kombinacija pojasnjevalne in opisne študije primera (Yin, 1994) ter primerjalna metoda. Na osnovi ugotovitev analize so predlagane možne aktivnosti za razvoj strategij trajnostnega turizma v Sečoveljskih solinah. Posebna pozornost je namenjena naraščajoči vlogi javno-zasebnih partnerstev v turizmu, za namen upravljanja okoljskih problemov. Zaradi posebnih značilnosti preučevane lokacije študije ne moremo ponuditi kot splošnega modela za dediščinski marketing ter trajnostni razvoj turizma v zaščitenih območjih; omogoča nam pa zanimiv vpogled v procese operativnega načrtovanja ter izvajanja zasnovanih strategij.

Zaščita in ohranjanje dediščine postaja pomemben vir za trajnostno turistično izkoriščanje območij kulturne in naravne dediščine. Istočasno pa je potreben tudi razmislek o zaščiti in ohranjanju teh območij ter njihovem gospodarskem razvoju. Sledi kulture pridobivanja soli odsevajo v enkratni kulturni, naravni, tehniški, etnološki in zgodovinski dediščini. Specifične metode in vzpostavljene dobre prakse lahko uporabimo tudi na primerih drugih zaščitenih območij. Ob načrtovanju prihodka s pomočjo trajnostnega turizma je pomembno da vzpostavimo sprejemljiv obseg in vpliv turizma na zavarovano območje; masovni turizem vsekakor ni zaželen.

**Ključne besede:** pozicioniranje krajinskega parka, soline, muzej, trajnostni turizem, kulturna dediščina, naravna dediščina, trajnostni marketing, dediščinski marketing

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