

Green Karst Region case-study (SI)

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What is really exciting about research is that it always reserves you the emergent and the unexpected. When I arrived in Postojna, I believed that the focus of my research would be an in-depth understanding about the governance and management of the amazing Underground Built Heritage (UBH) of Postojna show cave. Once on the field, however, I realized that it is hard to consider it as a “best practice” for catalyzing Community Valorisation. Indeed, although



Visiting Križna cave

successful in the re-establishment of a declining profitability, the private management of the famous show cave has been showing an almost exclusive interest in increasing profits, with no commitment in sustaining the economic growth of the area neither interest in a sustainable tourism development through community engagement and collaboration with local stakeholders.

During my stay I also had the valuable opportunity to know “more virtuous” models of sustainable management of UBH: Križna cave, particularly attractive with several underground lakes and watercolours, really offers you not only an authentic experience but also a true understanding of how the management - constituted by a NGO – is very careful of the vulnerability of the cave. The association constantly strives for a balance between heritage preservation and valorization in the pursuit of sustainable tourism development and is highly committed to increase local awareness about the importance of natural resources and the vulnerability of the underground eco-system. Beyond caves, I also visited what instead would have been the main focus of my scientific mission, i.e. some remains of underground military heritage of the so-called Alpine Wall Fortification built by the Italian army along the entire land border in the period between the First and the Second World War. Indeed, through a bottom-up process based on the involvement of the Regional Development Agency and a dialogue with local actors, the planning and implementation of re-use and valorization strategies of these remains were selected as suitable terrain to sustain the goals of the Cost Action through the experimentation of a Living lab approach and a process of incremental involvement of stakeholders, including the local community. All these caves are currently

ownership of the State of Slovenia and strategic decisions about them are on the Ministry of Defence. However, almost all of them are today in a state of abandon since huge investments would be required to restore and preserve them from further deterioration and acts of vandalism already registered in the past.

I visited the caverns on Primož hill (above Pivka town), Milanja (above Ilirska Bistrica) and Unška koliševka. Interviewing main people involved or interested in the process of re-use and valorization of the Alpine Wall ruins, I could understand the main challenges, risks and opportunities of undertaking it. It is worth reporting that in the case of the Alpine Wall fort on Primož Hill, managed by the public-owned Park of Military History, the process of re-use and valorization has already started and turns into tourist interest in visiting the fort; the situation is very different for other two groups of ruins that lay in a state of abandonment and are exposed to act of vandalism.

On 28th November 2019 the first meeting of the Living Lab was organized by the host institution, RDA Green Karst Ltd, and hosted by the park of Military History in Pivka. Twelve people from different organizations, including the Regional Development Agency, the municipality of Pivka, representatives of the Park of Military History, two local associations, the former director of Notranjska regional park and the director of a local Tourist Information Center, participated at the meeting, sharing their ideas and taking decisions about the process of re-use and valorization of the remnants of the Alpine wall fortifications in the region. The focus of the discussion was the identification of the most urgent issues to address and the set up of the trajectory of development to follow in future years. After identified main concerns and bottlenecks along with benefits and expected impacts of the process of re-use and valorization, participants discussed potential trajectories and advantages deriving from the re-use and valorization and finally, established future steps. In particular, they agreed to first map all underground military heritage spread in the Green Karst Region, through their geographical localization, and then to create a cadaster for all of them. To this end a group of experts would be involved to set up a suitable methodology of classification. Indeed these steps would be required to start a dialogue with State representatives as owners of these military structures and agree about the legalization of the activities of their re-use and valorization.



Meeting at the Park of Military History