

# MARKETING CONCEPT COMPONENT PART KROKAR

D.T1.3.8

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Sašo Gorjanc, Miha Varga, Bojan Kocjan, Špela E. Koblar Habič, Urban Prosen  
SLOVENIA FOREST SERVICE, Slovenia





## Abbreviations

BEECH POWER - Interreg Central Europe project: World Heritage BEECH forests: emPOWERing and catalysing an ecosystem-based sustainable development

PA - protected areas

SiDG - Slovenian State Forests Ltd.

SFS - Slovenia Forest Service

STO - Slovenian Tourist Organisation

UNESCO - United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

WH - World Heritage

## 1. Description of the Deliverable

The thematic work package 1 will sustainably enhance the cooperation between Protected Areas comprising World Heritage component parts and adjacent communities, on a regional and transnational level. In order to actively involve local stakeholders in planning processes, there were organised several different activities and events (workshops) where stakeholders were invited in included.

In Deliverable D.T1.3.8, marketing concepts from component part Krokar in Slovenia are presented. Marketing concepts are based on previous activities in Activity A.T1.3 Pilot implementation of 3 identified measures from former projects (testing and evaluation). In Activity A.T1.3 we organised kick-off meeting for relevant stakeholders - local working group for tourism and recreation (D.T1.3.6 and D.T1.3.7). This marketing concept itself covers mostly the activities, which will be led by stakeholders from local working group for tourism and recreation. The document of regional strategy (D.T1.2.1) goes hand in hand with these marketing concepts.

## 2. Introduction

Forest reserve Virgin Forest Krokar is the largest primeval forest remnant in Slovenia and represents an important glacial refuge that has never been used by humans and is the source area of the majority of extant European beech. The area has not been extensively visited in the past, both due to the wider region being zoned as a military area into which access was prohibited and since due to relative lack of awareness. The situation is changing both for the wider region and for Krokar component part, which is attracting more attention due to its inscription on the UNESCO List of natural WH. The visitor estimations are rough and likely not very accurate. The majority of visitors visit the area in May and June when flowering of daffodils and wild garlic can be observed throughout the forest and on the Krempa pass. The increased visitor pressure and interest are both a blessing and a curse. The increased visitor numbers are welcome to help in



developing the wider touristic destination and the UNESCO status helps with keeping the development sustainable and green. However, on the other hand, the Virgin Forest Krokar remained relatively untouched because of its inaccessibility and strict protection regimes, which prohibit entry to any visitors. Moreover, the southern edge of the component part is just above the cliffs over the Kolpa Valley which offer rare panoramic views in the region, that is almost entirely forested. The paths into the strict forest reserve are well traversed and visible, as well as known to most local visitors.

Visitor pressure has thus been recognised as one of the main pressures on the forest ecosystem within the reserve and identified as one of the best opportunities for development of the region and forming constructive partnerships with a variety of regional and local stakeholders. The marketing concepts will thus focus on development of different strategies to promote the tourism offer in the area that is both acceptable from nature conservation point of view, as well as economically viable.

### 3. Analysis of the current situation and of (existing) marketing concepts in the WH target area

There are currently no official marketing concepts in place specifically for the forest reserve Krokar. The Tourism Development Strategy for Kočevsko region does mention the forest reserve and aims to provide sufficient entry point infrastructure, while fully respecting the restrictions in place. Additionally, the Slovenian Tourism Organisation features Virgin Forest Krokar as one of the main attractions in the Kočevsko region. It is vital to develop a clear communication, marketing and promotion strategy, to reduce the negative impacts of the visitors in the area, as well as develop compelling narratives, branding, and sufficient visitor infrastructure.

The main stakeholder in the area are Slovenia Forest Service, Slovenian State Forests, municipalities of Kočevje, Osilnica, and Kostel, alongside the Institute for Culture and Tourism Kočevje (Institute Kočevsko). Additionally, local tourist guides and particularly photographers also represent important groups to address, as well. The entire area of the component part and its buffer zone is state-owned and thus managed by Slovenian State Forests Ltd, in accordance with forest management plans prepared by Slovenia Forest Service. While the reserve belongs only to the Kočevje Municipality, all three above mentioned municipalities have signed an agreement on common destination management and all are well positioned to benefit from well-developed tourism around Krokar. All local Tourist Information Centres operate under the umbrella of Institute Kočevsko.



## 4. Concept

- Overarching aim of the concept
  - Provide meaningful visitor experience outside of the reserve
  - Develop communication and branding strategies
- Definition of target groups
  - SFS, SiDG
  - Municipalities Kočevje, Osilnica, Kostel
  - Institute Kočevsko, local tourist providers
  - Photographers
- Positions and messages
  - The forest reserve Virgin Forest Krokar represents untouched nature developing naturally since before the last Ice Age and is the genetic source area for the vast majority of extant beech trees in entire Europe.
  - The outstanding universal natural value of the area has to be preserved for all future generations and must not be allowed to be threatened by any human activity.
  - The forest reserve Virgin Forest Krokar is a part of UNESCO WH and was recognised as important refuge for beech from where it spread to central Europe after the last Ice Age. Krokar is a part of extension in 2017 as a transboundary UNESCO WH property - Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe.
  - How to establish meaningful collaboration with local communities while respecting the protection regimes in place?

## 5. Objectives & Activities

The concept should reach the following objectives, which should be implemented through different activities:

Objective 1: Provide meaningful visitor experience outside the forest reserve

Activity 1.1: Provide guided tours for visitors along Borovška and Cerklje Nature Educational Trails presenting the story of beech expansion from this area all across Europe

- Arrange the Cerklje Nature Educational Trail with all necessary visitor infrastructure and with obtained permits



- In collaboration with Institute Kočevsko, SiDG, local tourist guides, and photographers develop visitor guiding narratives and offers to be marketed without entering the reserve (e.g. photographic workshops along the cliffs: Krempa, Krempa Pass, Firštov Rep, shorter and longer walks and integration of Borovška Nature Trail into them, linking nature with local legends and history)

Activity 1.2: Arrange the signage and viewpoints at Firštov Rep, Krempa, and Krempa Pass

- One of the main draws of the area for visitors are the views over the Kolpa Valley, some of the best of which are from within the strict forest reserve.
- In accordance with the Theory of the Choice Architecture, it is needed to provide other, plentiful, better arranged, and easily accessible viewpoints to redirect visitors there and reduce pressure on the virgin forest
- Develop marketing and promotional campaigns using photos from the alternative viewpoints, demonstrating that they are better than the ones within the reserve.

Activity 1.3: Develop an overarching rulebook for conduct and information given on guided tours around the forest reserve for any tourist providers that offer visiting Krokár or Borovec

- A common code of conduct should be agreed upon with the main tourist providers and their cover organisations (Institute Kočevsko, municipalities, local guides, SFS, SiDG)

Activity 1.4: Supplement the existing Borovška Nature Trail with updated interpretational infrastructure (e.g. boards) with focus on WH status and regulations in place

Objective 2: Develop communication and marketing strategies for future development of Krokár forest reserve

Activity 2.1: Develop clear communication strategy with rules for all involved parties (SFS, SiDG, Institute Kočevsko, STO)

Activity 2.2: Develop a brand for Krokár and new markation signs

Activity 2.3: Promotional strategy and its implementation

Activity 2.4: Develop appropriate visitor materials and information (printed and/or electronic)

- Visitor materials and information about the walks around Krokár and rules of conduct within the reserve to be prepared and readily available at Institute Kočevsko facilities, other local tourist providers. Sent to other stakeholders as well (Mountaneering association, local photography societies...)

Objective 3: Develop collaborations and programmes for schools (elementary and secondary)

Activity 3.1: Develop guided tour for experts and schools (SFS) - school in nature

Activity 3.2: Develop content for inclusion into the school curriculum



## 6. Implementation plan

- Where, when and who implements what, how often, which budget and with which priorities? Here we can provide a matrix, if we have it for us and translate it

Slovenia and the stakeholders responsible for implementation of laws and decision makers (Ministry for Environment and Spatial Planning, Ministry for Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Slovenia Forest Service, Slovenia State Forests Ltd., Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for nature Conservation) are currently in the process of drafting and harmonizing the decree, which will also lead to designating an official area manager. Current “de facto” manager in Slovenia Forest Service but does not have the full permission, legal basis and resources to officially and effectively manage forest reserve Virgin forest Krokar and its buffer zone forest reserve Borovec.

Due to the lack of official management in the area, we at BEECH POWER project cannot define any specifics like budget, priorities, who implements what and how often since these all depend of manager and his vision. This will probably have to be dealt with within the management plan of the newly established nature reserves in the future, if that status will be achieved. The Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning should provide funds for one of the key stakeholders to implement these actions.

By the latest current information from February 2021, the responsible ministry is already in process of preparing a draft Decree (on nature reserves), which has to be later on reviewed and agreed with all responsible ministries and other stakeholders. The optimistic plan is that this could be done still in 2021 year.

### D.T1.3.8: Marketing concept Krokar

Authors: Sašo Gorjanc, Miha Varga, Bojan Kocjan, Špela E. Koblar Habič, Urban Prosen - all Slovenia Forest Service

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