

Slovene Istria¹

A sustainable “green” destination
in the making, traversed by a cultural route

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1. Introduction

Slovenia, with around two million inhabitants and an area of just over 20,000 km², is a relatively small country that is mainly mountainous or hilly, with a portion of plain in the east, towards the border with Hungary. It has had over a thousand years of dramatic and turbulent history. Despite repeated destruction, as well as recent extended land use, it has maintained numerous pre-existing historic territorial configurations and large areas of countryside, to the extent that it is often referred to and marketed as “Green Slovenia”. Overall, it is a very varied nation, and, at the same time, it is rich in resources and tourist attractions of different kinds. Slovenia – which is almost rectangular in shape, with a protuberance in the northeast in the Drava and Mura Statistical Regions – constitutes, within Europe, an important crossroads for transit towards:

- the East, with Hungary and the rest of Eastern Europe;
- the South, with Croatia and the Balkans;
- the North, with Austria and Central Europe;
- the West, with Italy.

1. Though with a unity of purpose, Raffaella Gabriella Rizzo wrote paragraphs 3.1.1, 3.1.3, 4, 6, 7 and Luca Simone Rizzo paragraphs 1, 2, 3.1.2, 3.1.4. and 5.

This position is confirmed by foreign tourism, which has developed greatly since the Second World War.

Practically all of Slovenia is on dry land. Of its 212 municipalities, only Ankaran, Izola, Koper and Piran are on the (Adriatic) coast. These will be the subject of this dissertation. Having been amply involved in seaside tourism since World War II, they have now also opened up to cultural tourism. Tourism has recently also affected their immediate rural hinterland, in ways that are becoming ever more diverse. The various stakeholders – also in view of the considerable urbanisation that has involved all of the coastal belt – are dealing with the problem of sustainability, partly by adhering to the conceptions of destination governance and destination management (DM). Moreover, they are aware of the need to involve the local area in the light of the concept/instrument of a *Heritage Trail*. The European QNeST (Quality Network on Sustainable Tourism, <https://application.qnest.eu/>) project is an example and application thereof. The part regarding the Slovenian section of Istria to be found on the web has been coordinated by the University of Primorska (see Trono in this text figure 1 on page 19).

2. Objectives and methodology

For some time now, reflection has focused on the necessity to promote the minor towns and the rural territory (which is often rich in heritage) and on the importance of new and emerging types of tourism, to be developed by adopting a sustainable, slow and responsible approach. These goals are to be achieved by adhering to the concept of Europe's common heritage, whilst respecting and considering the Member States' national heritages.

Bearing this in mind, and in coherence with the objectives pursued by the QNeST project, we therefore sought to investigate the extent to which Slovenia is suited for this purpose. We consequently asked ourselves:

- do the natural and cultural assets make it possible to create interesting and varied proposals adopting a *route-based* and *resource-based* development model (which, as its strategic foundation, expresses attachment to its territory and the ability to incorporate distinctive identifying references in the value of its tourist product)?

- Do the territory’s actors allow for the creation of network products – which are modular and rely on synergy between filières and within themselves – that conform with the multi-faceted and experiential nature of the demand?

Replying to questions such as these called for the adoption of a desktop research methodology, examining the contents of academic publications and policy documents, as well as of websites.

The results of this study were then translated into the creation of a (multi-themed) cultural itinerary, which deliberately focused on the Istrian area (on the one hand, in order to make a logical selection of points of interest to offer the tourist; on the other, because of the possibility of dialogue with areas of Italy where the authors of this chapter are also working).

3. The geographical and tourism-related setting of Slovene Istria

3.1. *General aspects, Physical, settlement-related and agricultural characteristics, and related events*

3.1.1. General aspects

The territory under examination lies in the extreme southwest of Slovenia, in the Coastal-Karst Statistical Region (Obalno-kraška in Slovenian). It involves, in its most southern part, only the coastal communes of the “geographical region” of Istria – Ankaran, Koper, Izola and Piran – which look out over the Gulf of Trieste. This portion of land constitutes a de facto region and, at the same time, a statistical territorial unit: the *Koper Hills* (Perko, Ciglič 2020). It lies in the most northern sector of the Istrian peninsula and, over time, has developed its own identity: it is therefore referred to as *Slovene Istria*, as described by Juri:

Both from a functionalist and systemic point of view, the municipalities of Koper, Izola, Piran and Ankaran are able to constitute an individual region [...] It is a region that is now in a phase of deindustrialisation, in which the service sector,

based principally on the activities of the ports and on logistics, as well as on tourism, is highly developed, and where the relatively heavy industry of the Socialist period is giving way to production activities that have less of a marked effect on the environment. According to Frémont, it is therefore an exploded region, in which industrialisation and the tertiarization of the territory has created a robust organisation from an economic point of view, but which seeks its true identity in its regional iconography, which has sometimes been made to measure (Frémont 1984; Juri 2017, p. 26).

The four communes have very different surface areas: they go from a vast municipality like Koper, with over 300 km², to the very small one of Ankaran, which only broke away from Koper recently (table 1). Overall, in 2019, they had 89,814 residents.

3.1.2. Physical characteristics

The coast is mainly constituted of flysch and is about 47 km long. It is indented, rocky and stony, and has evolved continuously over the centuries due to natural phenomena and human intervention (Rossit 2015). Only in very rare stretches is it sandy. The Ankaran promontory lies to its north and that of Piran to the south, and it contains two bays: that of Koper and that of Piran, submerged estuaries formed by the flow into the sea of local waterways (Kolega 2015; Vahtar 2002).

Table 1. *The municipalities of Slovene Istria in the Statistical Region of Obalno-Kraška involved in 2019 in the QNeST project. Source: data processed by the Authors from <https://www.stat.si/obcine/en/Municip/Index/119>.*

Municipalities	Area in sq. km	Population	Density (inhabitants/sq. km)
Ankaran	8	3,215	399
Izola	29	16,367	573
Koper	303	52,540	173
Piran	43	17,692	407
<i>Tot.</i>	383	89,814	235
Others	660	25,799	-
<i>Obalno-Kraška</i>	1,043	115,613	110.8

Below the coast in the central part are the islands of the (old) city of Koper and the little town of (old) Izola: today, though, both are connected to the mainland (Suau *et al.* 2015: compare the historic maps in the article). From the coast, generally the land rises straightaway to altitudes of 100-300 m, up to the Karst Plateau. As a result, the zone as a whole is undulating – also with plateaus – or rugged (with crags on which settlements were built). Then, progressively, the terrain climbs again, reaching around 800 m above sea level in the eastern extreme of the commune of Koper (Pezzetta 2018). The zone is crossed – from north to south – by three short rivers: the Rižana, the Badaševica, and the Dragonja. Towards their estuaries, these originally widened out into flat, saline areas, subsequently given over in large part to agriculture. Here there were the salt pans of Sicciole/Sečovlje and Strugnano/Strunjan (Strunjan Landscape Park 2019; Finocchiaro *et al.* 2015; Rossit 2015; Lo Iacono 2008-2009; Selva 2007); today they are much reduced in size. Their history and present aspects are documented in the *Salt Pan Museum*. The route proposed by QNeST begins in fact in the area near Sečovlje. These sites have also been transformed into protected areas, along with the Nature Reserve of Val Stagnon/Škocjanski zatok, saved from being dried out and situated inland of the Port of Koper. (https://www.venetoagricoltura.org/upload/File/progetti_speciali/VS_ITA_Cartina.pdf). These constitute important tourist, hiking and educational attractions (Koderman, Tvrčko, Opačić 2020; Lipiej *et al.* 2020). The valleys running inland have allowed for the development of roads and the proliferation of settlements.

3.1.3. Settlement-related and infrastructural characteristics

The old towns of Koper, Izola and Piran developed historically in a compact manner, facing the sea, for hundreds of years. They were transformed in their urban layout and architecture by their various dominations, especially that of Venice, which lasted until 1797 (figure 1). As Di Paoli Paulovich notes (2016, p. 158), in the main town (i.e., Koper) «everything evokes Venice: its *palazzi*, its churches, the puteals of its wells and its houses squeezed in between the alleyways».

In the successive periods of dominion (Austrian, Napoleonic, Austro-Hungarian, Italian and Socialist), tourism also gradually began to hold sway, ini-



Figure 1. Tito Square in Koper. Source: photo by R.G. Rizzo, 2019.

tially in particular at Portorož, in the municipality of Piran, and then along the whole of the coast, dividing itself between traditional seaside pursuits, gambling, wellbeing and business meetings and events (Gosar 2014; Šuligoj 2020). For more details about tourism and for data regarding the accommodation situation (hotels and boarding houses) between the two wars in the last century, when Istria was Italian, we refer you to the comprehensive Guida del Touring Club Italiano (Bertarelli 1934, pp. 282-287 e 318-322) and to Kravečič (2020). With the independence of Slovenia in 1991, tourism increased substantially and became more diverse, and it has now also spread to the rural hinterland (Kumer *et al.* 2019; Bonjec 2006).

So, since the Second World War, the whole of the coastal area has been subjected to intense new construction for tourism and to renovation of various kinds of premises (hotels, multi-apartment villas, tower blocks, private apartments, rooms, etc.), with the aim of satisfying the needs for accommodation and eateries, including solutions designed by the architect/town planner Edo Mihevic (Kraj 1999).

Both in the “old” parts of the towns (usually refurbished apartments) and elsewhere, a lot of homes have been made suitable for tourist use, a fact that is also clearly made evident in the listings of Airbnb (and by Cvelbar and Dolnicar 2017). There has also been a considerable spread of residential and other construction in the suburbs, with completely new neighbourhoods being

built. Moreover, immediately behind the coastal belt, industrial and service areas and highways have been constructed, as well as premises and car parks for the supermarket sector (Umek 2019). The whole of the coast therefore – if considered from a local point of view – now appears as a conurbation, even if it is interrupted by areas of green. At a national level, this constitutes one of the three “centres of international importance” – Ljubljana, Maribor and Koper-Izola-Piran (Dimotrovska Andrews 2000 p. 117) – and one of the Functional Regions (FRs) of Slovenia (Drobne *et al.* 2010, p. 297). If one then widens one’s sphere of observation to the cross-border area, one notes that our conurbation is part of the “transborder metropolitan city of Trieste-Koper” (Čebren Lipovec 2019; Gasparini *et al.* 2010).

From the ’60s onwards another important territorial change has taken place: the town of Koper has spread northwards with the new infrastructure of its port (more than 1,600 ha), now shared with the commune of Ankaran (Twrđy *et al.* 2012; Trupac, Kolenc 2002).

Along the coast three tourist harbours have also been built, the most important of which is the Marina of Portorož (Uran Maravić *et al.* 2016). All of the many interventions in the area had, however, caused Stokin to remark at the 15th ICOMOS Symposium in 2005 that «the most important issue is how to manage the degraded cultural heritage and the monuments and sites between urbanisation, industrialisation and cultural tourism» (p. 3).

As regards the settlement of the suburbs and the hinterland, however, a characteristic should be underlined whose roots go well back in time: it is a common trait also throughout Croatian Istria that there are – apart from towns of varying size, such as Koper, Piran, Izola and Portorož – also a very large number of villages (*naselje*) (Kusar 2013): more than 100 just in the municipality of Koper, at between 5 and 30 km from the coast. These too have been the subject of modernisation and recent construction. The distribution of this settlement process has contributed to the creation of a dense and ramified network of minor roads, now taken advantage of also for bicycle tourism and trekking.

The various settlements are interspersed with plantations of vines and olive trees, as well as with the wild vegetation of Mediterranean scrubland. Also, the whole area has experienced another phenomenon, typical of many western countries following World War II: the spread of second homes (Koderman 2014).

3.1.4. Agriculture, its derivative products, and the events and initiatives connected with them

In the area under examination there are three principal crops: viticulture, olive growing, and fruit farming. The first of these is, indeed, a key sector for the whole of Slovenian agriculture. Wine contributed 11% to the nation's economy in the period 2018-2020 (EU Slovenia agri-statistical factsheet 2021, p. 9). Within Slovenia, various vine-growing areas are to be found. Slovene Istria is one of these (VTC₄ in the cartography in Kerma 2012 p. 239). Here wines have been produced from indigenous varieties (Malvasia Istarska, Teran and Refošk) and international cultivars (Cabernet, Chardonnay and Merlot) in 1,091 viticultural farms since at least 2010 (*ibidem* p. 241; Pičuljan *et al.* 2019; Jurinčič, Bojnec 2009). In 2020, official statistics registered 2,639 vineyards along the coast in the district of Primorje-Slovenska Istra (<https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/1528327S.px/table/tableView-Layout2/>). Growing olives – the other classic Mediterranean crop *par excellence* – is also present here, and Slovene Istria constitutes the most northern zone in the Mediterranean where it is practised. This activity, with alternating results due to sometimes adverse weather conditions (years with frost) and the abandonment of agriculture in the hinterland in the past decades, is now widespread up to altitudes of around 250 m (Ogrin 2007). Olive growing, viticulture and substantial areas of xerophilous spontaneous vegetation are typical of the landscape of Slovene Istria, sometimes growing on terraces (Ažman Momirski, Gabrovec 2014). There are a number of important events which, during the course of the year, feature the products of the land: *Olive, Wine and Fish Festival* (Izola); *Artichoke Fest* (Strunjan); *Persimmon Fruit Feast* (Strunjan); *Orange Wine Festival* (Izola); *Sweet Istria* (Koper); *Refuscus Mundi* (Izola) and *Malvasia Festival* (Portorož). These are highlighted by QNeST (see the website for their individual descriptions). Apart from the sale of products and their consumption locally, these events include a wide variety of initiatives: entertainment involving music, dance and other artistic pursuits, workshops, masterclasses and either organised or individual excursions (<https://www.portoroz.si/en/all-news/news/7604-slovenian-istria-in-autumn-colours>). These also involve the restaurants (Sedmak 2021) and wine routes. Moreover – and not only on these occasions – many wineries, olive

oil mills and *agriturismi* are open for tastings and sales, sometimes linked to innovative types of international cooperation (Hribar *et al.* 2021; Kumer *et al.* 2019) and combined with specialised forms of tourism (cycling holidays, MTB, etc.).

4. Tourism in recent years

4.1. Tourist flows

Information on tourist flows – using the indicators of arrivals and overnight stays – can be obtained from three sources:

1. United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO);
2. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
3. Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office (SiStat).

The UNWTO website allows one to have access to data for inbound and outbound tourism from 2010 to 2021 at a countrywide level (cfr. <https://www.unwto.org/country-profile-inbound-tourism>). As regards the situation during 2020 and 2021, we recommend consulting the site offered by the Slovenian Tourist Board; the figures, however, refer only to Slovenia as a whole: «Of 4 million tourist arrivals and more than 11 million tourist overnight stays generated in Slovenia in 2021, foreign guests generated 1.8 million arrivals and 4.8 million overnight stays» (see <https://www.slovenia.info/en/press-centre/press-releases/18568-2021-in-a-review-slovenian-tourism-stats-numbers>).

For our area, on the other hand, our findings are based on data provided by the Republic of Slovenia Statistical Office (SiStat). Details are given here of the situation regarding the most recent years: 2019 and 2020 (i.e., the last year pre-pandemic and the first of Covid-19). The situation in 2019 is illustrated in tables 2 and 3. Around 1/6 of total arrivals and 1/5 of overnight stays of tourists in Slovenia are concentrated in the four municipalities, with a prevalence of visitors from abroad. In 2019, foreigners represented 75% of tourists in the whole of Slovenia, and 64% in our area. With 31,887 beds, its accommodation constituted 1/6 of that available throughout Slovenia.

Table 2. Arrivals of domestic and foreign tourists, municipalities, Slovenia, 2019. Source: processed by the Authors from <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/2164525S.px>.

Municipality	Arrivals (Tot.)	Domestic Arrivals	Foreign Arrivals
Ankaran	83,335	47,277	36,058
Koper	103,786	32,849	70,937
Izola	148,173	71,703	76,867
Piran – Portorož	720,495	191,960	426,535
<i>Total</i>	<i>1,055,789</i>	<i>343,789</i>	<i>610,397</i>
<i>Total Slovenia</i>	<i>6,229,573</i>	<i>1,527,695</i>	<i>4,701,478</i>

Table 3. Overnight stays of domestic and foreign tourists, municipalities, Slovenia, 2019. Source: processed by the Authors from <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/2164525S.px>.

Municipality	Overnights (Tot.)	Domestic Overnights	Foreign Overnights
Ankaran	318,914	190,785	128,129
Koper	293,662	83,837	209,785
Izola	529,069	293,843	225,226
Piran – Portorož	1,874,462	583,802	1,290,660
<i>Total</i>	<i>3,016,067</i>	<i>1,152,267</i>	<i>1,853,800</i>
<i>Total Slovenia</i>	<i>15,775,331</i>	<i>4,404,365</i>	<i>11,370,766</i>

The Slovenian official source provides the currently available data also for 2020 – the first period of Covid-19 – during which one can note a clear drop in arrivals. Those of Slovenia have been halved, with a notable reduction especially in the foreign component. The same pattern of behaviour is to be seen also in our area. There is only available disaggregated data, however, for the two municipalities of Izola and Piran (tables 4 and 5). In these, on the other hand, one can note a growth in domestic tourism, that based on proximity. This growth should be seen partly in relation to government incentivisation measures, such as vouchers (Republic of Slovenia 2020, p. 31).

4.2. Slovenia and its tourism resources

Characterised by 12 Statistical Regions – an administrative legacy of the 7 historical Provinces – Slovenia is a country that reveals itself in the eyes of the tourist as four macro-areas for tourism:

Table 4. Arrivals of domestic and foreign tourists, municipalities, Slovenia, 2020. Source: processed by the Authors from <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/2164525S.px>.

Municipality	Arrivals (Tot.)	Domestic Arrivals	Foreign Arrivals
Ankaran	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Koper	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Izola	103,248	78,723	24,525
Piran – Portorož	368,510	244,554	123,956
<i>Total</i>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Total Slovenia</i>	3,065,085	1,848,971	1,216,114

Table 5. Overnight stays of domestic and foreign tourists, municipalities, Slovenia, 2020. Source: processed by the Authors from <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/en/Data/-/2164525S.px>.

Municipality	Overnights (Tot.)	Domestic Overnights	Foreign Overnights
Ankaran	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Koper	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Izola	412,118	336,728	75,390
Piran – Portorož	1,272,942	873,804	399,858
<i>Total</i>	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
<i>Total Slovenia</i>	9,204,374	5,850,018	3,354,356

1. *Alpine Slovenia*;
2. *Mediterranean Slovenia and the Karst*;
3. *Pannonian Thermal Slovenia*;
4. *Lubiana and Central Slovenia* (www.slovenia.info; see also Renko 2020 p. 7).

In these areas, it can offer a varied range of – even specialised – types of tourism (table 6) (Timothy 2021; Wartyo *et al.* 2017), also with a view to co-creating a tourist experience (Richards 2021) associated with an *experience-driven* philosophy based on a “value in experience” approach (Pencarelli and Forlani in Richards 2021).

Containing natural and cultural destinations included in UNESCO’s World Heritage List, Slovenia has highlighted its image as a tourist destination – also thanks to the *I Feel Slovenia* brand (Binter *et al.* 2016) – in various ways:

- the cities of Maribor and Nova Gorica have been awarded the title of European Capital of Culture, in 2012 (<https://ec.europa.eu/culture/guima->

Table 6. *Types of tourism in Slovenia and related specialised tourisms. Source: drawn up by R.G. Rizzo.*

Macro-type of tourism	Specialised tourism
1. cultural	Religious; historical/artistic; architectural; walled towns; festivals (music, literature, cinema); museums; based on memory, folklore and local traditions
2. regarding agriculture and food resources	Food tourism; bee tourism; wine tourism; mushroom picking; olive oil tasting...
3. nature-based	Mountain areas; the Pannonian plain; coastal; parks and nature reserves; adventure parks and ziplines; geotourism
4. sports-based	Alpine skiing; cross country skiing; trekking; biking; climbing; water skiing; stand up paddling; rafting; kayaking; fishing; speleology; parachuting; hang gliding; hot-air ballooning; tourism on horseback; golf
5. gender-based	LGBT
6. sustainable	Ecotourism; rural tourism; <i>agriturismo</i>
7. professional	Conferences and business

raes-and-maribor#maribor) and for 2025 (<https://ec.europa.eu/culture/chemnitz-and-nova-gorica#nova-gorica>) respectively;

- various destinations have been selected, starting in 2008, within the EDEN project as *European Destinations of Excellence* (https://ec.europa.eu/growth/sectors/tourism/eden_en; see table 7).
- many locations have been attributed *Green Destination* certification for their sustainable development (<https://greendestinations.org/>; table 8): the tourist destination of Bled, with its homonymous Lake and Castle; the Bohinj Valley in the Upper Carniola region, in the Julian Alps; the city of Ljubljana, with its architectural designs by Jože Plečnik; the spa town of Rogaška Slatina; the town of Koper with its cultural tourism, or the municipality of Vipava, renowned for its wine production. These are just some that are worthy of mention;
- thanks to its typical wine and food products, Slovenia was honoured – within the World Region of Gastronomy programme – with the title of *European Region of Gastronomy of 2021* by the International Institute of Gastronomy, Culture, Arts and Tourism (Kukanja Peštek 2020; <https://www.europeanregionofgastronomy.org/>). This accolade is a consequence of the gradual growth of Slovenia as a gastronomic destination, begun in 2006 with the Strategy of Gastronomy and the subsequent brand *Taste Slovenia*. This Strategy was focused on the development and implementation of a

Table 7. EDEN destinations in Slovenia by year, Statistical Region and tourism category. Source: processed by R.G. Rizzo.

EDEN Destination	Statistical Region	Year	Category of tourism
Podčetrtek	Savinjska	2019	Health and wellbeing tourism
Koper	Obalno-Kraška	2017	Cultural tourism
Brda	Goriška	2015	Tourism and local gastronomy
Lasko	Savinjska	2013	Accessible tourism
Idrija	Goriška	2011	Tourism and regeneration of locations
River Kolpa	Jugovzhodna Slovenija	2010	Aquatic Tourism
Solčavsko	Savinjska	2009	Tourism and protected areas
Soca Valley	Goriška	2008	Tourism and intangible local heritage

Table 8. Slovenian Green Destinations in January 2022. Source: processed by R.G. Rizzo from <https://greendestinations.org>.

Green Destination	Green Category	N. per category
Bohinj	Platinum	1
Bled; Kamnik; Komen; Laško; Ljubljana; Logarska Dolina Solčavsko; Miren-Kostanjevica; Podčetrtek; Radolca; Rogaska Slatina; Rogla-Zreče; Soča Valley; Vipava	Gold	13
Bela Krajina; Brda; Brežice; Hrpelje-Kozina; Idrja; Koper; Kranjska Gora; Lenart; Postojna; Ptuj; Radlje ob Dravu; Šentjur; Sevnica; Škofja Loka; Slovenj Gradec; Šmarješke Toplice; Sveta Ana	Silver	17
Blagajeva Dežela; Celje; Cerklje; Divača; Kanal ob Soči; Kočevsko; Kostanjevica na Krki; Litija Šmartno pri Litiji; Maribor; Moravske Toplice; Nova Gorica; Novo Mesto; Razkrižje; Rečica ob Savinij; Sežana; Velenje; Žalec	Bronze	17

range of products of the destination based on the Slovenian culinary identity of local products in the sense of a gastronomic boutique. This in turn led, over the years, to the drafting of an *Action Plan for the Development and Marketing of Gastronomy Tourism 2019-2023* (Slovenian Tourist Board 2018). In 2020 the programme – which set out to create a relationship between the gastronomic destination and the concept of Slovenia as a “green” country with unspoilt countryside – was already in the heart of its final phase, which seeks to give emphasis to the country’s international gastronomic visibility by means of targeted marketing activity.

5. Policies regarding sustainability, tourism, cultural heritage and international collaboration

In the last twenty years, various pieces of legislation have been adopted in Slovenia with the aim of protecting the countryside, safeguarding cultural heritage (Pirkovič 2017), incentivising sustainability, increasing tourism and improving certain aspects regarding the sector (Rangus *et al.* 2018). We list below the principal documents:

1. Nature Conservation Act 1999;
2. Cultural Heritage Protection Act 1999;
3. Preservation of Cultural Heritage Act 2008;
4. Green Tourist policy: Strategic guidelines 2009;
5. Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism 2014;
6. Law for the promotion of the development of tourism (ZSRT-1) 2018;
7. Strategy of Sustainable Growth of Slovenian Tourism 2017-2021.

These documents foresee the involvement of public and private actors, of local communities and – in the indicated cases – of obtaining certifications.

One should bear in mind that in 2014 the European Commission published its “Action Plan concerning the European Union Strategy for the Adriatic and Ionian Region”, to which Slovenia belongs. This document indicates 8 Actions to be implemented for a «diversified tourism offer (products and services)», which were then reiterated in the Strategy of Sustainable Growth of Slovenian Tourism 2017-2021. It also suggested – for 2020 – the creation of 5 new macro-regional routes. Moreover, it recommended 7 Actions for «sustainable and responsible tourism management (innovation and quality)» (COM 2014).

Of the various documents, we wish to concentrate here on the Strategy of Sustainable Growth of Slovenian Tourism 2017-2021, whose contents encapsulate all the others (Rangus *et al.* 2018, p. 231). This strategy is detailed and complex, and aims at achieving a principal target, as well as secondary objectives. In the former case, it seeks to achieve as its «key target: international tourist receipts [to] EUR 3.7-4 billion». In the latter, to arrive at the following secondary targets (*Ibidem* p. 12): «5-5.5 million tourist visits; 16-18 million overnight stays; average length of stay 3.1-3.4 days; 18,000 to 22,000 new tourist rooms, of

which 8,500 will be renovated and 6,500 will be new rooms in the hotel sector; to increase full-time employment in the tourism sector to 12,000 employees».

A strategy was therefore put in place that focused on the 6 Key Policies listed below:

1. A New Organisational Structure: Macro Destinations and Tourism Products;
2. Institutional and Legal Framework;
3. Accommodation, Tourism Infrastructure and Investments;
4. Human Resources in Tourism;
5. Space, Cultural and Natural Assets;
6. Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises.

The municipalities that are under examination in this paper are located in the Mediterranean Slovenia Macroarea: we are talking about four communes out of eight (*Ibidem* p. 19). All are considered leading destinations and to meet the aims of the policy 4 Key Products and 8 secondary products are targeted for the area (table 9).

The policies are put into practice by means of a wide variety of instruments. Here we focus on that of revalorisation of the territory and of tourism, constituted in particular by a *trail* (also referred to as a *route* or *itinerary*). It may be long-distance and transnational or national, regional or local in character. Moreover, it may be themed or mixed. Slovenian tourist development is supported

Table 9. *Tourist products to be implemented in the Mediterranean Slovenia Macroarea. Source: a summary from Republic of Slovenia-Ministry of Economic Development and Technology, 2017, p. 19.*

Key Products	Secondary products
Business Meeting & Events	Gambling
Sun & Sea	Outdoor
Health & Wellbeing	Experiences in Nature
Gastronomy	Culture
	Countryside Tourism
	Touring
	Special Interests
	Cruising and Yachting

by 12 Regional Destination Organisations – already advocated by Juvan, 2011, and put into effect by Ministerial Decree – that collaborate with the municipal authorities. One of the outputs of local tourism development is constituted by the provision of walking and cycling trails, facilitated by these same authorities (OECD 2020, p. 274). Then, on different scales – from transnational to local – we have seen operate stakeholders involved in European projects under the aegis of the Interreg ADRION 2014-2020 programme (Interreg ADRION programme 2021). Often, they have produced routes on various scales. In this publication QNeST is listed on p. 77 – among 62 projects – in Priority Axes 2 *Sustainable Region*. After careful screening, it seems clear that a means to highlight the cultural heritage and the tourism resources as a whole that destinations have to offer to tourists and excursionists is constituted by organising *routes/trails*, as affirmed also by Koščak (2015) (Koščak, O'Rourke 2018; Koščak *et al.* 2017). A *route* is made up of a combination of points of interest, actors in the local area (both private and public) who operate towards tourism-related ends, dedicated services, and an actual cartographic itinerary. Routes in this sense become instruments for touristic and territorial use, as well as for marketing. In the paragraph below – applying this concept to Slovene Istria in conformity with the intentions declared in the above-mentioned documents – we put forward a proposed itinerary, designed to highlight the cultural heritage of the area under examination.

6. Slovene Istria and the QNeST routes for cultural and sustainable tourism

6.1. *The “route” as an instrument for navigating the territory and highlighting points of interest*

The routes being proposed have continued to increase in the last few years. In the QNeST project for our area, four local routes have been devised:

- A) *Joyful Istria*;
- B) *The path of Istria stone sea and olive oil trees*;
- C) *The path of everyday man*;
- D) *Wandering through Istria*.

These are offered as one-day tours, each also with a specific itinerary as can be evinced from the project's cartographies (see <https://application.qnest.eu/routes>). The POIs under consideration are 19 in all:

1. Forma Viva Seča (Portorož);
2. Hotel Palace with a Park (Portorož);
3. the Giuseppe Tartini Theatre (Piran);
4. the Venetian House (Piran);
5. St. George's Church (Piran);
6. Tartini Square (Piran);
7. Town Tower of Koper;
8. Archaeological Park Simonov Zaliv (Izola);
9. the Praetorian Palace (Koper);
10. the Carpaccio House and Square (Koper);
11. Tito Square (Koper);
12. the Church of the Assumption of Mary (Koper);
13. the Podpeč Castle (Podpeč, Koper);
14. the Da Ponte Fountain (Koper);
15. Hotel Adria Convent (Ankaran);
16. the Socerb Castle (Socerb);
17. the Monument Nob and Pre-War of Fascism (Marezige);
18. the Kubed Castle (Kubed, Koper);
19. the Church of Sv. Trojica (Hrastovlje).

Each of these routes penetrate in a capillary manner within the coastal strip and then leave it to reach – in the hinterland – some locations that are particularly significant as points of interest or as places to enjoy rural, food and wine experiences.

As far as this paper is concerned, we take Route (A) as our example, but enriching it with POIs compared to the QNeST proposal by including some from the other routes. The trail as a whole run through the territory of the Istrian inter-district administration (ACC), which includes the already-mentioned municipalities of Piran, Izola, Koper and Ankaran (<https://www.koper.si/it/amministrazione-intercomunale-dellistria/>; see § 1). It is intended for cultural tourism *tout court*. One can in fact consider the nineteen POIs in their

entirety as indicated in the QNeST brochure. At the same time, the route allows for experiences of cultural sub-tourisms, such those related to history/remembrance (POIs nos. 11 & 17), art/architecture (POIs nos. 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 13, 14 & 18), museums/cultural monuments (POIs nos. 1, 2, 8 & 15), religious tourism (POIs nos. 5, 12 & 19) and, lastly, music (POIs nos. 3 & 6).

Alongside these 19 POIs there are interesting resources that merit being pointed out: Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, Strunjan Landscape Park, Škocjanski zatok Nature Reserve, House of the Sea, and the Koper Regional Museum.

6.2. Details of the route

The itinerary begins at the Salt Pans of Sečovlje before continuing in the southern part of the small Seča peninsula near Portorož with a visit to the open-air museum of *Forma Viva* – a theme park entirely dedicated to contemporary stone sculptures (Božeglav Japelj 2009) – and ends in the hinterland of the village of Hrastovlje at the church of the Holy Trinity. It is a multi-themed route that includes walled towns, castles, UNESCO sites, historic hotels that are considered to be cultural monuments, European Destinations of Excellence (EDENs), nature reserves, etc. Within it are connected around twenty very varied points of natural, economic and cultural interest. The majority of these



Figure 2. *Interior of the Cathedral of the Assumption and Saint Nazarius in Koper. Source: photo by R.G. Rizzo, 2019.*

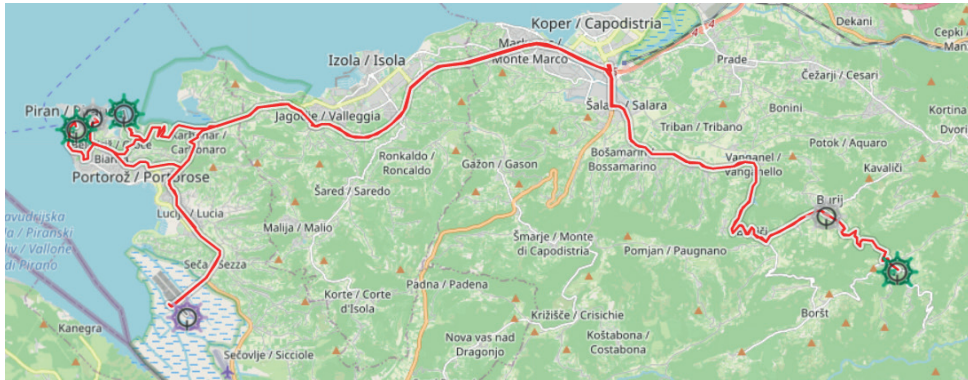


Figure 3. The QNeST route in Slovene Istria. Source: <https://application.qnest.eu/routes>.

are also described (on the website) as Landmarks, and have the characteristic of displaying in a diachronic manner significant elements of the history of this area: from the Roman period in the Simon's Bay Archaeological Park in Izola with its remains of a seaside villa (Lazar n.d.; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=9xBg6htVQAg>) and finds from the ancient port before gradually offering evidence of many subsequent periods, through to that of contemporary history. Sometimes the POIs are found as individual elements; others are grouped together, as in the case of the old town centres of Piran and Koper.

Otherwise, some cultural POIs could be combined, considering them according to their field of interest: one might focus on painting, for example, and then be drawn towards music. In the case of paintings, because the two towns of Koper and Piran contained a high concentration of churches, one finds in those that have remained or in the museum of Koper pictures of great worth. One name is enough to prove the point, and is one of the area's great attractions: "Carpaccio", from the 15th and 16th centuries, whether we are talking about the father (Vittore) – to whom a square in Koper is dedicated – or the son (Benedetto) (Maier 1943: we cite this work, because it too may be considered a piece of cultural heritage). Their paintings are to be found in Koper, in the Cathedral of the Assumption and Saint Nazarius, in the Rotunda, and in the Regional Museum. Koper – EDEN 2017 Town for Cultural Tourism and a Silver green destination (see § 4.2, tables 7 and 8) – was also, for centuries, an important centre for music. Notable are the many musical instruments being

played by delightfully executed angels in altarpieces, oil paintings and frescoes. These works of art can be found in POIs of cultural heritage already mentioned in Koper, but also in a little rural village like Hrastovlje, in a painting in the church of the Holy Trinity by Giovanni de Castua from around 1490 (Koter 2013). This church represents an unusual example of a fortified place of worship, and we propose it at the end of the route. Piran, on the other hand, was the birthplace of Giuseppe Tartini, an important composer and musical theorist who is today famous worldwide.

7. Beyond QNeSt: some reflections in conclusion

Based on the above analysis of the tourist context of Slovene Istria – both in terms of tourism resources and tourist flows – one could give a positive reply to both questions posed in paragraph 2. Researching in internet, in the guise of a hypothetical tourist, allows one to maintain that the routes are well illustrated, both on the web and in the advertising material. These are accompanied by a rich selection of long-distance trails drawn up by organisations in Slovenia, partly as a result of European Community-backed projects. We draw your attention, for example, to the following websites and/or documents:

- <https://www.ita-slo.eu/it/INTER%20BIKE%20II>;
- https://issuu.com/visit-idrija-slovenija/docs/pohodni__tvo_2016_it; <https://issuu.com/slovenia/docs/ciclismo-slovenia-it>;
- <https://www.slovenia.info/uploads/publikacije/kolesarstvo-zemljevid/cicilismo-map-slovenia-it.pdf>.

Even the local trails are well-detailed. The municipality of Koper is, for example, advertised with routes for all kinds of excursions: on foot, on horseback, etc. (see <https://www.koper.si/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Guida-15-sentieri-tematici-scelti-ITA.pdf>). These itineraries are also highlighted by communities, like those, for instance, proposed by the link <https://it.wikiloc.com/percorsi/escursionismo/slovenia>.

At an institutional level, one can infer that the Slovenian Tourist Board – whose work can be consulted in terms of a *double face* tourism proposal (i.e.,

“ordinary” turista and business tourist) on the www.slovenia.info/it website – does not operate as an isolated entity. It has put into effect (and is seeking new) collaborations and synergies with various bodies and/or subjects in order to implement its network in the most diverse tourist segments and also on various scales, including a transnational one (see, in this regard, the informative/promotional video interviews with Aljoša Ota, in charge of the Slovenian Tourist Board for Italy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eY-jmVP2R-I>, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvT1kwDNsKo>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gTvEudw19hU>).

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