

Bridging Heritage and Progress: Perspectives on Tourism Development in Gorski Kotar, Croatia

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Abstract

The paper examines the paradoxical scenario of Gorski Kotar, an important Croatian transit corridor. Despite being situated in the tourism-centric county of Croatia, the region faces a notable deficiency in tourism offerings and visits. The research focuses on key elements of major infrastructure, a historic road and a motorway, to shed light on the untapped potential of Gorski Kotar's tourism sector. The Lujzijana Road, a significant cultural heritage, once served as an important link to the Adriatic ports and the coast, promoting the progress of the region and transit tourism. The construction of the modern motorway, while speeding up access to the coastal destinations, inadvertently bypasses the cultural and historical richness of Gorski Kotar, leading to a decline in tourist stopovers. The research methodology includes desk research and semi-structured interviews with local residents and roads' users, which provided insights into the challenges and opportunities in the tourism sector of the region. By examining the interplay between the human and built environment, this research attempts to bridge the gap between historical significance and modern infrastructure. It highlights how infrastructure can play a role in tourism as a tourist offer, and how infrastructure can both promote and hinder the development of tourism.

Introduction¹

Gorski Kotar is a Croatian region that is historically rich and naturally beautiful. However, the region struggles with a significant lack of tourist offers and visits. The use of two road infrastructures in tourism is explored in this paper: The Lujzijana Road as a historic road and Rijeka–Zagreb motorway as a modern motorway; and its impacts on the development of tourism in the region. The focus of the research is on the interplay between the human and built

environment and it seeks to highlight some of the issues and challenges associated with the road infrastructure and tourism development in the region. Although infrastructure has been built in the name of modernisation, progress and development, the impact on the region is diverse and even paradoxical, including on tourism. The aim of the research is to examine the role of road infrastructure in tourism development, in two directions: (1) infrastructure and its associated content as a tourism offer; (2) infrastructure as a

¹ The research presented in this paper was conducted as part of dissertation research and is contained in the unpublished dissertation Jarec, Morana. 2021. "Infrastructural projects and socio-cultural construction of space in Gorski kotar" („Infrastrukturni projekti i društveno-kulturno oblikovanje prostora u Gorskoj kotaru"). PhD diss., University of

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facilitator or obstacle to tourism development; as seen by the local population and its users.

Gorski Kotar is a rural region in western Croatia, bordering Slovenia to the north and north-west, the Rijeka coast to the south-west, and region of Lika to the south-east. It is part of the Primorje-Gorski Kotar County. For a long time, the region was characterised as an isolated area, but since the first half of the 18th century and especially in the 19th century, with the construction of roads and the exploitation of forests, the importance of Gorski Kotar as a transport and trade centre between the coast and the Croatian mainland has steadily increased. Gorski Kotar is very different in appearance from the surrounding regions: it has a high mountain character, although its peaks are slightly higher than 1,500 metres, with extensive forests. The settlements are scattered, with no significant concentration of population. It covers an area of 1,270 km², two thirds of which is forested (Lukić et al., 2009: 158). There are three towns (Čabar, Delnice, Vrbovsko) and six municipalities (Brod Moravice, Fužine, Lokve, Mrkopalj, Ravna Gora, Skrad) with a total of 18,954 inhabitants, which corresponds to a density of only 15 inhabitants per square kilometre (The Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Gorski Kotar is an area that, by land, offers the only possibility of connecting the interior of Croatia - and thus Central Europe - and the northern Adriatic coast. The construction of the first macadam roads through Gorski Kotar breathed new life into the settlements they passed through and touched, accelerated the development of Gorski Kotar, their routes changed and modernised over time and are still of great importance to the lives of the inhabitants today. The Lujzijana Road was the first modern macadam road to pass through Gorski Kotar. It was built between 1803 and 1811 and connected the towns of Rijeka and Karlovac.² It was of great importance for the development of the region: it led to an increase in the number of inhabitants and immigration to the settlements along the route, new

professions related to the road emerged, such as blacksmiths, farriers, innkeepers, etc., social life developed, many associations were founded, as well as schools (Jarec, 2021). The material features of the Lujzijana Road such as bridges, retaining walls, milestones and cisterns are considered “elegantly and architecturally unusually designed” (Szavits Nossan, 1970: 188). Early travellers described the Lujzijana Road as “the fruit of many years of experience and a rich spirit of invention” (ONB, 1805: 57), that deserves “admiration” (ibid.: 58) and as “one of the most beautiful roads” (ANNO, 1830: 43). The modernity of the road infrastructure also attracted postcard producers who recognised the potential profit from this novelty, a modern spectacle. Stories about the construction of the road and its builders, unusual and famous travellers, vehicles and cargoes, anecdotes, information about the service in the taverns and inns, the interaction between travellers and locals, and generally about the way of life represent the intangible elements of the Lujzijana Road.

Even though it has been rerouted and modernised over time, the Lujzijana Road is of such great importance to the region that it is considered a landmark and cultural heritage. The road brought prosperity to the region as it facilitated trade and encouraged the development of transit tourism along its route. At the beginning of the 19th century, taverns and inns with barns were built out of necessity. Going to the coast or to the mainland, both travellers and animals had to rest from the journey. Later, other forms of tourism emerged, such as medical and sports tourism, with Gorski Kotar being a destination. At the beginning of the 20th century, more representative tourist and gastronomic facilities were opened, municipal infrastructure was developed and tourist activities were better organised (Knežević & Grbac Žiković, 2013: 118). Inns and restaurants were built for profit, and such establishments sprang up along the road. In the 1960s, with the development of summer resorts on the coast and increasment of the car

² First road connection between Rijeka and Karlovac was Karolina Road, built in the first half of the 18th century. However, with its frequent steep ascents and sharp bends, it did not served all the needs of trade and transit. In the second

half of the 18th century, the need for a new road arose. This is the reason why Lujzijana Road is called the first modern macadam road in Gorski Kotar.

traffic on Lujzijana Road, transit tourism became one of the pillars of the Gorski Kotar economy (ibid.: 119-120).

The construction of the Rijeka–Zagreb motorway through Gorski Kotar in the second half of the 20th century marked a time of new changes in both physical and social space, in the lives of the local population and road users. The main function of the motorway is to direct economic traffic, especially tourist traffic, from Central Europe and the Croatian mainland towards the northern Adriatic coast and Istria, areas that are most visited by tourists. The construction of the motorway, which began in 1970 and was completed in 2008, had a significant impact on the further development of the region, including tourism. Tourists preferred to use the motorway to get to the sea faster, the journey was much shorter and it was no longer necessary to stop. With the opening of the motorway through Gorski kotar for traffic, transit tourism has lost its economic importance for the region. On the other hand, it relieved the traffic on the Lujzijana Road that runs through the settlements. The motorway was built through an already heavily depopulated region³, and it contributed to the further emigration of the population of Gorski Kotar (Feletar, 2016: 225). With the decline in tourist traffic and the closure of businesses offering catering and gastronomic services, people lost their source of income and many of them emigrated to other parts of Croatia or abroad. Even though Lujzijana Road has lost its traffic importance, it is still used for local and transit transport. This includes users who do not want to pay motorway tolls, who want to get to know the region's countryside and towns, who want to avoid traffic jams and in the event of motorway closures (Feletar, 2016: 226).

Throughout history, the hospitality industry in Gorski Kotar has been conditioned by the development of roads through the region. In addition to its distinct transit importance and its natural beauty, the tourist

potential of Gorski Kotar is also reflected in its proximity to the sea. While tourism is emphasised in the literature as the most important activity for the future, “requiring coordinated spatial solutions” (Wenzler, 1981: 263), in 2019 Gorski Kotar received a total of 40,506 tourist arrivals and 98,964 overnight stays were achieved, while in the entire Primorje-Gorski Kotar County in the same year a total of 2,966,489 tourist arrivals and 15,314,671 overnight stays were achieved (The Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2019). This means that only 1.36% of arrivals and 0.05% of overnight stays are attributable to Gorski Kotar. In 2018, tourism and tourist activities accounted for only 2.8% of the total income of entrepreneurs in Gorski Kotar (Horwath HTL, 2020: 15).

Despite having adequate road infrastructure, the region struggles to attract tourists, who usually use the motorway to bypass Gorski Kotar on their way to the seaside. While “sun and sea” tourism dominates in the coastal areas, Gorski Kotar offers a different kind of experience, centred on cultural and historical heritage, nature and sports. However, this diversity is not adequately promoted or supported, partly due to insufficient investment by the state in tourism development. In 2021, none of the nine projects applied to a call for proposals *Investing in starting, improving or expanding local basic services for the rural population, including recreational and cultural activities and related infrastructure* (Krpmotić, 2021). The same scenario repeated itself in 2024, when six tourism projects from Gorski Kotar submitted to the call for proposals for the *Croatian National Resilience and Recovery Plan* did not make it into the selection of eighteen projects that are 100% co-financed by the EU and the state (Bičak, 2024). All projects from Gorski Kotar, which have a combined

³ Gorski Kotar reached its demographic peak in 1890 when it had 43,518 residents. In 1961, it had 38,088 residents, but major declines happened between 1971 and 1981 (in 1981 it was registered 31,692), and between 1991 and 2001 (in 2001 it was registered 26,120 residents) (The Croatian Bureau of Statistics, 2001). In 2011 census it was registered 23,011, and in 2021 only 18,954 residents (The Croatian Bureau of

Statistics, 2011; 2021). In the mid-20th century, there was a significant shift in the population of Gorski Kotar towards non-agricultural activities, however there was not an urban regional centre that could provide employment opportunities. In addition, growing influence of cities outside the region (Zagreb, Rijeka, and Karlovac) has gradually led to the depopulation of smaller settlements (Feletar, 2016: 209).

value of 25 million euros, ended up on the so-called reserve list (*ibid.*).

Adding to these challenges, the region has experienced significant depopulation throughout history, resulting in a high proportion of elderly and retired residents (Lajić & Klempić Bogadi, 2010; Lajić, 1999). This demographic shift has weakened the local social capacity to advocate for projects or independently initiate large-scale development efforts. Nevertheless, the enthusiasm, ambition, and positive attitudes of the local population towards developing tourism remain evident. The establishment of the Gorski Kotar Tourist Board in 2020 marked an improvement in the region's organizational structure, and local governments are beginning to take a more active role in tourism development. Despite this progress, the region still lacks sufficient recognition and support from the state. This underscores the need for greater collaboration between local and national authorities to unlock the region's full tourism potential.

Theoretical framework, methodology and literature overview

The road infrastructure is of great importance for this Croatian transit corridor and the roads are deeply rooted in the identity of its inhabitants, as they unite their human, spatial, economic and ethnographic situation: "All interests related to paths, roads and modern transport routes complete the picture of the personality of Gorski Kotar and can serve for ethnographic conclusions" (Gotthardi-Pavlovsky, 1981: 361). However, infrastructure in general is sometimes taken for granted, it is simply there, it exists. We do not think about where electricity comes from, how electronic messages travel across the planet, or where the water from the toilet goes. One of the first publications to address the methodological issues of infrastructure research is "Ethnography of Infrastructure", which argues that infrastructure is by definition "invisible" and that we only notice it when it fails, that is, only then does it become "visible" (Star, 1999: 380, 382). However, the "invisibility" of infrastructure is only one aspect of the whole spectrum. For the people who build it, live near it or depend on it, infrastructure is certainly very visible (Hetherington &

Campbell, 2014; Kincanon, 2019; Masquelier, 2002). Infrastructure changes the world in complex, sometimes subtle, but also powerful ways. Its construction is inextricably linked to promises (Anand et al., 2018; Löfgren, 2004), and through it, citizens learn about the power of the state (Harvey & Knox, 2015). Although infrastructure projects are conceived as projects of modernisation or progress, they sometimes pose challenges and threats, fail to fulfil promises, perceptions and expectations, and create inequalities. Their significance is therefore complex and their impacts are manifold. Regardless of whether it is political, economic or social power embedded in infrastructure, it has different effects in different places, at different times and on different people (Jarec 2021). Examining the importance of infrastructure for the local population and focusing on tourism development, this paper argues that infrastructure plays a complex and often overlooked role in shaping spaces and that it can favour both progress and underdevelopment.

This research examines how individuals in local communities perceive role of road infrastructure in tourism development as a cultural and social phenomenon. Tourism inherently involves the movement of people, cultural exchange, and the transformation of local spaces, it shapes cultural representations and power dynamics. It impacts local economies, identities, and social structures and reflects broader global-local interactions. Exploring local perspectives contributes to understanding how tourism trends intersect with rural areas and local ways of life. The first part of the results and discussion is dedicated to the Lujzijana Road, which is considered a cultural heritage by the local population. Their perspectives, experiences and efforts are presented to illustrate the desire to turn it into a tourist product in the form of a cultural route. Even though they have not been successful, some road users choose to travel and sightsee along Lujzijana Road, whether for nostalgic reasons or out of a desire not to rush anywhere. The second part of the results and discussion focuses on the Rijeka-Zagreb motorway. Even though it led to the closure of local businesses that profited from transit tourists, it was built out of necessity, as the amount of

traffic flowing through Gorski Kotar could not be managed on the Lujzijana Road. This article is not a plea against the motorway, but examines the promises and predictions about the impact of the motorway on the region, especially on the tourism sector, as well as opportunities for mutual benefit, through perspectives of the company managing the motorway and local community. As this research seeks to understand local perspectives and lived experiences, the methodology used includes qualitative methods, key tools of anthropology: desk research, observation with participation, and semi-structured interviews conducted in the period from 2015 to 2020. Participation in the tour for local enthusiasts and entrepreneurs was arranged by the Lujzijana Association and provided an opportunity to have informal conversations about the challenges and opportunities in tourism sector. Some of the interviewees were found through the same association, others through the snowball method. Men predominated among the participants, and the average age was 60. All participants quoted in the paper are identified by their age.

The Rijeka–Zagreb motorway's negative effect on the region was examined by the geographers Aleksandar Lukić, Vuk Tvrтко Opačić, and Ivan Zupanc (2009). The paper highlights that the opening of the motorway has exacerbated regional disparities, leading to economic regression in areas along the Lujzijana Road while benefiting settlements near motorway intersections. Main methods include analyses of demographic statistics, traffic information, and technical data related to the motorway, and field research involving mapping, questionnaires, and interviews in catering units along the Lujzijana Road, as well as in households in two settlements in Gorski Kotar, one that found itself in a disadvantaged position with the opening of the motorway, and the other that prospered economically after the building of the new motorway intersection. Art historian and museologist Klementina Batina (2004) discusses the heritage of Gorski Kotar, emphasizing its rich material and immaterial cultural identity that remains underappreciated. The paper identifies various natural and cultural attractions that can enhance tourism in Gorski Kotar, while also addressing the need

for improved infrastructure and accommodation. Ethnologist Tihomira Stepinac Fabijanić (2016) published a paper about traditional culture along the Lujzijana Road, focusing on the Gorski kotar. She discusses the impact of the road on local architecture, folk costumes, and traditional crafts, highlighting their evolution from the 19th century to the present. The research incorporates bibliographical data and ethnological notes from field studies, emphasizing the significance of preserving cultural heritage amidst modern influences. It also addresses the socio-economic changes in the region due to migration and the decline of traditional practices. By investigating the economic significance of transit tourism in Gorski kotar, Rade Knežević and Renata Grbac Žiković (2013) highlighted its evolution through four distinct periods. The paper emphasizes the need for revitalization strategies in areas where transit tourism has diminished, highlighting the complex socio-economic implications of these changes.

While previous studies have analyzed the economic, demographic, and cultural impacts of road infrastructure in Gorski Kotar, there is a certain gap in representation of local residents' perspectives and how they engage with these roads as part of their everyday lives. By conducting fieldwork several years after the motorway's completion, this research provides novel insights and evolving attitudes towards these infrastructures. It bridges the gap between ethnographic and infrastructural studies by examining not only the practical functions of these roads but also their symbolic and cultural significance (see also Jarec, 2019).

Results and discussion

With its architectural and monumental values, its history and significance, and the nature that surrounds it, Lujzijana Road represents an untapped tourist treasure. Although the development of transit tourism in the second half of 20th century has given the area around Lujzijana Road the physiognomy of a tourist region and despite the large tourist traffic, the area around the road has not become a functional region: non-commercial facilities such as car parks and their equipment (marked parking spaces, sanitary facilities,



playgrounds, outdoor tables and benches) as well as more complex accompanying facilities such as information centres have not been built along the road route (Knežević & Grbac Žiković, 2013: 124). However, the Lujzijana Road, with its tangible and intangible components, is increasingly being recognised as a cultural heritage and historical attraction that has the potential to become a valuable tourist product in the form of a rural cultural route (Perinić Lewis & Jarec 2016). It would serve as both a tourist destination and a tourist transit product. In the search for new tourist attractions and new tourist products, modern tourism is increasingly turning to cultural routes, specially established tourist paths or roads along which thematically orientated tourists move (Kušen, 2013: 37). A cultural route, according to the definition of the authors of the Manual for the Management of Tourist Visits on Thematic Cultural Routes, is “a physically tangible section in space defined by an inventory of tangible and intangible, cultural and historical elements that are linked thematically, conceptually or by definition, as well as by the identification of locations of existing cultural assets that are linked in a punctual, linear or regional structure; that form a marked and interpreted continuous whole within the unique context of the route” (Androić et al., 2012: 7). The non-governmental organisation Lujzijana played a central role in the attempt to turn the Lujzijana Road into a cultural route. It commissioned the Croatian Institute for Tourism to carry out a tourist evaluation of Lujzijana Road. The Institute published a study entitled *Lujzijana as a Cultural and Historical Attraction: A Development Concept (Lujzijana kao kulturno-povijesna atrakcija: razvojni koncept)*, whose authors recognise that “the evaluation of this road and the wider area through which it passes can serve for a better market positioning of Gorski Kotar and for a more systematic organisation of the offer in this micro-region, with the aim of generating more tourist traffic that would promote medium and small tourism entrepreneurship, create new jobs, reduce the sense of isolation of the inhabitants of Gorski Kotar and affirm their cultural identity” (Kušen & Tomljenović, 2009: 68-69). This study analyses the tangible components of the Lujzijana Road as potential and real attractions, such as architectural landmarks, service and catering facilities, milestones,

bridges, cisterns, tree-lined avenues, viewpoints, etc.; also lakes, caves, forest parks, castles and settlements as rural attractions, and states that the attractiveness of the Lujzijana Road also includes its intangible cultural-historical segment (ibid.: 70-78), such as the manner of its construction, its builders, historical stories related to the construction and use of the road, and the way of life. Although the authors emphasise that some of the material components need to be renovated and accommodation capacities adapted, and that the counties need to make numerous creative and financial efforts, they predict that by 2012 the Lujzijana Road will be “the first fully integrated cultural and tourist route; the Lujzijana Road will be a recognisable tourist product of Croatia, basing its recognition on a well-organised cultural and tourist offer, a professional itinerary management system and quality tourist services” (ibid.: 81). However, the local governments were not interested in developing this project any further. In 2014, the Lujzijana Association entered into cooperation with the Institute for Anthropological Research, the Archaeological Museum in Zagreb and the Municipality of Kočevje in Slovenia to apply for funding from the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) for cross-border cooperation between Croatia and Slovenia with the project *Historical Roads and Trails of Gorski Kotar and the Kočevje Region*. The following year, after becoming the Lujzijana Cooperative, they drafted a project entitled *Historical Roads and Trails of Gorski Kotar – Cultural Routes* with the intention of obtaining funding from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), with the possibility of including the Lujzijana Road in international cultural routes. These activities are some of the examples of the efforts and interest of the local population to improve tourism in the region with their own efforts. The President of the Lujzijana Cooperative said:

Our goal is to attract as many owners of family farms, as many tourist sites and everyone else who has something to do with the tradition of the historic roads of Gorski Kotar, and to give them not only the opportunity to enter the network of these historic roads, but also to have the opportunity to apply for EU funds through this project, which can

improve their offer, and that means creating the basis for increased revenue. Unlike some local governments and tourist boards in Gorski Kotar, that have shown no interest so far, the entrepreneurs, craftsmen and owners of family businesses in this area understand what an opportunity this is for their development, so they are cooperating to a very high degree and I can say that the response is so great that we have to choose. (Androić according to Krmpotić, 2015)

Although the above projects have not been accepted for funding, they show that the driving forces for activities to enhance tourism, revitalise and economically recover the region are the local population, local associations, individuals, small entrepreneurs, family business owners, etc., while local governments and tourist boards “still show no interest”. In the Master Plan for the Tourism Development in Gorski Kotar, the Lujzijana Road is not mentioned at all (Horwath HTL, 2020). In conversations with the locals, we learn that they feel forgotten and are dissatisfied with the authorities.

Firstly, we don't have tourist agencies, secondly, at a national level, not everyone in the tourism sector sees us as someone special to invest in... (Thirty-year-old woman)

Our tourism office here only has one employee and one volunteer. And if there's no that intern, then there is only one person. I don't know how you think, but one person for the tourist office... I think that's impossible. (Sixty-year-old woman)

The Lujzijana Cooperative organised numerous other activities, public forums and meetings to raise funds for its efforts and put ideas into practise. It was also the organiser of the tourist tour of Lujzijana Road in 2015, which was an opportunity for fieldwork for this research, observation and participation. On that occasion, one of the organisers said:

We are witnessing this terrible depopulation process in Gorski Kotar. Everyone who is familiar with these demographic trends knows that one of the elements is the loss of territorial identity or the loss of the sense of belonging of the local population, with the economy of course being the most important part. When we talk about the economy, I will tell you a terrible fact that nobody really emphasises, probably to hide the incompetence of the people who should be developing tourism. Primorje-Gorski Kotar County has a share of about 20% of the total tourism product. In terms of overnight stays and the number of arrivals, it is in second place, just behind Istria County. Twenty per cent in Croatia! Even ahead of Dubrovnik! And that Gorski Kotar accounts for less than 0.5% of this product, in this heritage that we are talking about now, despite the national park, protected nature, natural beauties and, most importantly, the transit corridor... You have to drive through it, it connects Central Europe with the northern Adriatic ports! (Fifty-year-old man)

The former president of the Rijeka Road Association was one of the speakers at the tour of Lujzijana Road who spoke about his own efforts to preserve the architectural heritage of Lujzijana Road:

I tried, that was the article we wrote, in 2008 we went down Lujzijana Road and tried to give some guidelines on what should be done to preserve it. In 2008, we laid out everything that should be done, of which only the sundial was renovated and nothing else. And we passed on the conclusions from that trip to everyone, from the Ministry of Culture to Croatian roads, Croatian motorways, tourist boards, I don't know, Rijeka, Čavle and everyone else along the Lujzijana Road. (...) We edited it and sent it to all these addresses, and we got nothing, not a single reply, not even criticism from anyone. (Sixty-year-old man A)

In addition to the aforementioned sundial, which was renovated on the initiative of the Rijeka Road Association, one of the milestones on Lujzijana Road was also renovated by Croatian Roads and the Municipality of Čavle. It is located within the serpentine, where a rest area has also been set up so that one can stop at the viewpoint. In addition to its tourist function, the restoration of these historical structures and features is also a way of protecting and safeguarding social memory. In order to make the journey a tourist experience, architect Kušen also emphasises the need for a long-term strategic goal of equipping state roads with an appropriate number of rest areas, viewpoints and accompanying service facilities that can be used to promote the area through which the road passes, but also the entire Croatian tourist offer (2013: 35).

Travelling along the Lujzijana Road as a tourist road or unofficial cultural route has nevertheless taken place. The publication of the book *On Old Roads to the Sea (Starim cestama do mora)* by Lara Černicki and Stašo Forenbaher in 2012 marked a turning point in the tourist experience of the Lujzijana Road. It offers a systematic overview of the history and characteristics of four roads, written in the style of a travelogue. The book's foreword states:

We have travelled the old roads countless times, since the time when they were the only roads on which one could travel to the coastal towns. For us, they were just a means to get to our desired destination. Many years later, after the initial enthusiasm for the new motorways, we realised that although we were saving time by rushing, we were losing the very essence of travelling. So, we started travelling the historic roads again, sometimes by car, sometimes by bike and sometimes on foot. We visited them step by step, hoping to find any trace that might tell us something about their past. There is not much traffic on the old roads. You can drive along them

at your leisure and enjoy the landscapes, the architectural skill and the sense of beauty left behind by their builders. You will have the opportunity to discover hidden corners and neglected traces of the past. Perhaps you will at least briefly feel the spirit of the old days, when people still travelled by carriages and ox carts. Distance, speed and time had a completely different, now forgotten meaning. (Černicki & Forenbaher 2012: 8-9)

The authors are actually writing about deceleration. Slowing down today means reducing the speed of an ever-growing regime that is built on the logic of speed (Vannini, 2014: 116). For Phillip Vannini, who deals with the sociology of everyday life, slowing down therefore means influencing the way we inhabit the world and in turn be influenced by it; slowing down means behaving and moving differently, experiencing the environment in a way that is counter to the logic of speed; slowing down means conceptualising life differently, imagining time as an alternative to the logic of speed – for oneself and for others (2014: 117). Vannini builds his argument of slowing down - of travellers, tourists and things that move "slowly" - on tactics (de Certeau, 1984), as oppositional everyday practises, that is, as opposites to the dominant culture of speed. Examples of deceleration include the slow preparation of food, so-called Robinson tourism, a way of life without electricity, etc. Tourists interested in such slow tourism and slow travel are interested in locality, ecology and quality of life, which has its roots in societal pressures for lower-carbon travel and less commodified tourist experiences (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010: 1). Slowing down is also a way of increasing physical skills to develop a reflective awareness of self, movement and sense of place (Vannini, 2014: 122-123). From conversations with road users through Gorski Kotar, it appears that efforts to promote

such slow tourism are also justified from the tourists' perspective:

Someone who organises tourism in Primorje-Gorski Kotar county, (...), would have to somehow get tourists to turn off the main road to see something, you have to offer them something. So, you have to see a building, a natural beauty, and you have to offer them something to eat. And then maybe you can entice them to get out of the car. But it's obvious that more and more of these tourists who are travelling by car are doing exactly that, exploring the area, driving on local roads, seeing the local population, seeing the beauty of nature, more and more people are functioning in that way. We do that too. And Gorski Kotar could do a good job here, because it has all the prerequisites for interest in such a trip. In my opinion. And good food and beautiful nature and strange landscapes, and the climate. The summers are colder, in winter there's a real winter atmosphere. (Sixty-year-old man B)

For many interested travellers, the book *On Old Roads to the Sea* served as a travel guide or handbook. Some of those who picked up the book travelled and documented their journey themselves with descriptions and photographs on social media. Those online travel writers, follow the book's instructions and literally copy parts of the book into their texts. They want to inform readers about historical features, write down their impressions, discover new places, they photograph milestones, bridges, dilapidated inns and look back nostalgically on ancient times: "there was also a rest house for tired travellers; today it is difficult to see the former liveliness of people, horses and other animals; but there was eating, drinking, shouting, kissing, fighting; and then it was quiet" (*On Old Roads to the Sea*, Facebook page 2015);

and also on the recent times, when the Lujzijana Road was the busiest: "we turn into Lujzijana, drive through Zdihovo⁴ – a graveyard of once successful and always crowded restaurants, where the smell of spit roasted lamb spread for kilometres" (*Time on Two Wheels (Vrijeme na dva kotača)*, blog 2019).

In 2009, geographers Lukić, Opačić and Zupanc also saw the possibility of transforming the Lujzijana Road into a cultural route and pointed out the problem of inadequate coordination and communication: "The activities that have already begun are not coordinated with the motorway construction project" (Lukić et al., 2009: 166-167). According to historian and geographer Petar Feletar, the modern Rijeka–Zagreb motorway, in conjunction with the natural and socio-geographical features of the wider area, has finally valorized the road connection from the Croatian interior to the coast (2016: 20), and the author of a monograph on the same motorway calls it the "road of life" (Moravček, 2007). In a broader, national and regional context, it is a modern material creation that has successfully overcome the mountainous obstacles of the region and, by enabling higher speeds, shortening the journey, has contributed to the overall economic development of Croatia, especially in terms of tourism. However, the complex significance of the Rijeka–Zagreb motorway for Gorski Kotar is palpable. Plans and predictions of a positive economic impact on the Gorski Kotar region can be traced in the literature from the time before the motorway was built. The monograph of Gorski Kotar from 1981 predicts an increase in the tourist value of the region through which the motorway passes, as well as industrial development: "Due to the proximity of the large urban centres of Rijeka, Zagreb and Karlovac, especially when the new

⁴ Zdihovo is a settlement on the Lujzijana Road. It used to be a popular stopover on the way to the sea.

motorway is built, the tourist value of the Central Region⁵ will increase considerably” (Pavić, 1981: 16):

Even today, the Central Region is of great importance in terms of transport, as the planned new four-lane Zagreb–Rijeka motorway is to be built here between the old Karolina⁶ and Lujzijana roads. This motorway will not pass through settlements, but will have junctions and intersections with existing roads. This new road should stimulate industrial development in the Central Region. (ibid.: 15)

Others also wrote about the expectations that the Rijeka–Zagreb motorway will have a positive impact on tourism in Gorski Kotar due to the proximity of cultural-historical sites and to the motorway (Batina, 2004: 190; Androić, 2007; Kušen & Tomljenović, 2009: 69). The company managing the Rijeka–Zagreb motorway committed itself in its monograph to “cooperation with the community in the areas through which the road passes” (Prskalo according to Moravček, 2007: 11–12), and its website states:

The increasing transit through Gorski Kotar is of great importance because it connects the Croatian coastal area with the mainland, which also has an impact on the economic development of Gorski Kotar, especially tourism. This leads to an increase in employment opportunities for the local population in various economic sectors along the motorway. (ARZ, n.d.)

Although the monograph *Motorway Rijeka-Zagreb (Autocesta Rijeka-Zagreb)* from 2007 does not provide any information about the manner of cooperation with the local population, it continues:

When planning the Rijeka–Zagreb motorway, special attention was paid to harmonising the route with the landscape qualities, so that the construction of the motorway, including roadside service facilities as its components, preserves the authentic indigenous values of the natural and anthropogenic landscape, such as the natural relief, the richness and integrity of biocenoses, individual biotopes and the totality of biotopes, existing settlements, nature reserves and more. (Moravček, 2007: 294)

Other studies proved that the motorway actually showed social insensitivity towards the local community: limited employment opportunities in the service facilities along the motorway, the inability to promote rural households and restaurants that already existed on Lujzijana Road and elsewhere, the lack of signposting to landmarks and natural phenomena (with the exception of Risnjak National Park) or the possibility of using Lujzijana Road as an alternative route (Lukić et al., 2009: 16), all of which is actually understandable from the point of view of the company managing the motorway and collecting the toll.

What the company benefits from directly, however, are the service areas along the motorway, which could be designed in such a way that they also benefit local tourism. The Rijeka–Zagreb motorway in the Gorski Kotar region has two rest areas: Kupjak, which can be approached from both directions, and Lepenica, with access from the direction of Zagreb. Both are designed with no particular regard for region-specific values. There are several publications by architect Eduard Kušen (1999, 2013) on motorway service areas and how they should look and function, how they

⁵ According to the geopolitician Radovan Pavić, the Central Region is a part of Gorski Kotar that extends through the central part of Gorski Kotar, between Bosiljevo and Severin in the east and Gornje Jelenje in the west, its other borders

consist of higher mountain relief, which begins in the west at Crni Lug and in the southeast at Mrkopalj and Ravna Gora (Pavić, 1981: 14).

⁶ See footnote 2.



should be arranged, organised and equipped, and how they should relate to the passenger experience: motorways and their rest areas are the first points of contact for travellers and tourists, especially from abroad, providing the first impression of the region and country they are passing through. A motorway rest area should be protected from wind, noise, smells and polluted air, be outside the “stress” zone, have adequate vegetation and forest cover, have viewpoints and be close to historical sites and buildings, contain children’s playgrounds, picnic areas, benches and information boards – these are what Kušen calls “humane” features (Kušen, 1999: 16). In addition to the above-mentioned contents, the rest areas should also have regional characteristics in their appearance. For modern tourism, it is no longer enough for motorway rest areas to be clean and well-maintained, they must also be recognisable and attractive to tourists and thus contribute to the quality of the traveller's tourist experience: “In addition to the utilitarian aspect, which is essential for users, and the support of road safety, it is necessary to provide relaxation and comfort for passengers of different age groups and to unobtrusively interest them in the values of the space and regions they are passing through by introducing them to the cultural, historical, natural, gastronomic and other attractions of the immediate and wider surroundings” (Mlinarić according to Kušen, 2013: 21). Kušen is of the opinion that Croatia missed the opportunity in the 1970s with the construction of new motorways to “optimally valorise rest areas along its most important road routes for tourism: these rest areas as a central framework for all accompanying service facilities are usually callously located, programmed and designed, exclusively according to engineering standards of minimum distances between accompanying service facilities, and are located on inhumanly elongated construction sites in the stress zone along the road” (Kušen, 2013:

23). *The Master Plan for the Tourist Development of Gorski Kotar* (Horwath HTL, 2020: 92-93) proposes the establishment of a tourist information centre for visitors to Gorski Kotar as a tourist infrastructure to be located in the existing Kupjak service area, a large roadside service area that already contains a petrol station, restaurant, children's playground, car park and other facilities. The aim of the project is to create a unique place of information about the tourist offer of Gorski Kotar, where motifs and experiences of Gorski Kotar as well as local products, gastronomic specialities and activities in the destination will be presented (ibid.). The centre should also be interactive and technologically equipped (virtual reality, touch screens, etc.) and have an outdoor area that would attract guests in transit (ibid.). However, the steps that need to be taken are challenging, such as determining a micro-location on the existing service area, defining an architectural solution, securing funding, building the centre, to name but a few, and bearers of the projects should be Gorski kotar Tourist Board and the Municipality of Ravna Gora, according to the proposal (ibid.). The authors of the plan have not estimated the level of investment as it depends on a number of factors. The proposed project highlights a promising vision of a centre that could serve as a gateway to the region, showcasing Gorski Kotar's unique attractions and creating stronger connections between transit travelers and the local community. Significant challenges remain, including securing funding, so the project has not yet been realised.

In the monograph of Gorski Kotar from 1981, the same author who predicts economic growth through the motorway also sees a different future. Due to Zagreb's aspiration for the sea as the most important emitting focal point in Croatia, Gorski Kotar retains only a small number of guests passing through it (Pavić, 1981: 16), and also:



The advantages of the geographical location of the Central Region are mainly related to its use as a transit route since the beginning of the 18th century, which benefited the economic development of Gorski Kotar – although the location of the passage, in addition to the possibility of integration into the economic life of other regions, can also become a cause of its own backwardness, because the main forces of economic development do not have to affect the transit area. (Pavić, 1981: 15)

Although it improves access to the larger urban centres, the rural area through which the motorway passes falls into a “communication shadow” (Lukić et al., 2009: 156), or assumes a tunnel effect (Graham & Marvin, 1996: 60). The tunnel effect is caused by the uneven “bending” of temporal and spatial barriers by an advanced infrastructure network that aims to bring urban environments into interaction while excluding most of the space through which it runs (ibid.). It is not only motorways that have the tunnel effect, but also air and rail transport and other types of infrastructure created in the search for greater speed (Andreu according to Graham and Marvin, 2001: 202). Participants in this study confirm that the Rijeka–Zagreb motorway has not brought any good to Gorski Kotar, but has caused the decline of many catering establishments and a decrease in tourist visits.

That's a minus for Gorski Kotar, because they said it would be a plus, it isn't... Nobody sees you, you zoom off to Rijeka and see neither Ravna Gora nor us (Brod Moravice), and again we are nowhere. (Sixty-year-old man C)

I mean, we're dying a little, that's not new. I'm afraid we've reached the end of the road. A very important reason for this is that a modern road, a motorway, has been built near Ravna Gora, which has taken over the traffic. People used to come to

Skrad and park in the big car park down there or the slightly smaller one up there, they would park their car and go to the bar that was open back then. And then they would have a bite to eat there, then they would have a drink, and then they would interact, you know. The people from Zagreb used to say: 'We' ll have lamb in Mirni Kut, we'll have cottage cheese with cream in Skrad and in Lokve...' there's nothing left there now, there are just the remains of the power station by the road, I think there used to be a big restaurant there, you know. Now there's nothing left, everything is as if nothing ever happened there. There's nothing there anymore, only the power station is still there. And then they would drive through Jelenje on this winding road down to the main road and then to Crikvenica, or to Krk. (Eighty-year-old man A)

It did no good. It bypassed... Listen, along Lujzijana the lambs were turning, it was all full, even towards Moravice, it's all gone now. There were famous restaurants there. And now they are operating at a lower capacity or have simply disappeared from the map. Because all that took place in these small communities, in these inns and pubs, tourism retained here. And now, listen, the bus lines have disappeared... For example, Skrad, you just have to work hard, you have to have an idea, then you can turn it to your advantage. Skrad has completely deteriorated. In the sixties it was a tourist place, you had bus stops, fifty buses stopped there every day. They stopped there for half an hour, and you could get coffee, strudel, gemišt. If one doesn't have a car now... I don't know how many lines there are, if you can catch one or two to Zagreb. The one who doesn't have a car... it is a bit of a problem. (Sixty-year-old man D)

The motorway is different, when the motorway came, everything died. And when the old road was, oh my, in Skrad there was... a hotel, a bus station, there was... everybody stopped and it was like a rest area. Until this road took over traffic. It was

trendy to go to Skrad, to party and so on. And the express trains stopped there, they wouldn't stop at every station. Fast trains stopped in Skrad. Tourism ruled in Skrad. (Eighty-year-old man B)

On the other hand, communities and especially entrepreneurs near motorway intersections do not share the same experience. Motorway intersections determine development through their location. They are few in number but they have clear advantages: they are the access and connection points, and enable the dispersion of traffic flows into the surrounding area (Sić 1997: 86). The Rijeka–Zagreb motorway has four interchanges in the Gorski Kotar region, and their location has created new regional differences (Lukić et al., 2009). Some of the Gorski Kotar population surveyed believe that the motorway is beneficial for the tourist activities nearby motorway junctions:

There was a big camp in Lokve, the lake was always full of swimmers, a lot of, say, twenty or so boats, people were building boats there, fishing boats, Lokve was the centre of events, of tourism. What was good for Fužine is that they are now much better connected to the motorway than Lokve, it's not exactly direct, but it's somehow different. (Seventy-year-old woman)

(Motorway) doesn't bother us. It doesn't bother Kupjak. But it bothers them down there. It bothers Skrad, Severin and even Lokve. It's even better for us. I don't know... We have an exit from the motorway nearby... It's great for us. (Seventy-year-old man)

With what we do, if I had to tell a man from Zagreb that it would take him two and a half hours on the old road, he would give up. I tell him you'll be here in 50 minutes. (Thirty-year-old woman)

The great advantage of this part of Gorski Kotar is that when lazy people from Primorje get in the car,

they get here in 12 minutes from Grobnik. Believe me, they would black out if they had to drive two minutes longer. (Forty-year-old man)

Communities located near motorway interchanges have experienced some positive changes, benefiting from better accessibility and increased regional traffic. These areas have capitalized on their proximity to the motorway and have seen improved connectivity for tourists and businesses alike. This divergence in experiences adds to the complex, uneven impact of the motorway on Gorski Kotar.

Conclusion

The Lujzijana Road represents a significant yet underutilized cultural and historical asset with the potential to become a major tourist attraction. Despite rich architectural, historical, natural and symbolic features associated with Lujzijana Road, the lack of investment in basic and advanced tourist infrastructure has hindered its transformation into a functional tourist region. However, ongoing initiatives by NGOs and individuals demonstrate a strong local commitment to revitalizing the road as a cultural route. These efforts highlight the potential for leveraging EU funding and fostering collaboration among local stakeholders, including family businesses and rural entrepreneurs, to create sustainable tourism opportunities. While local associations, entrepreneurs, and community members are the driving forces behind initiatives to enhance tourism and preserve cultural heritage, a lack of support remains a significant obstacle.

By integrating the tangible and intangible heritage of the Lujzijana Road into a cohesive cultural tourism product, this initiative can contribute to economic growth, cultural preservation, and enhanced regional connectivity, ultimately positioning the road as a recognizable and valued element of Croatia's tourism landscape. The

Lujzijana Road has organically developed into an unofficial cultural route, attracting tourists interested in slow travel and the rediscovery of historical paths. This deceleration aligns with modern trends in sustainable tourism. By addressing the gaps in coordination and leveraging the growing interest in slow tourism, Gorski Kotar could revitalize this historic route, fostering economic growth while preserving its unique identity. The shocking disparity in tourism contributions despite its strategic location and natural and cultural assets highlights the urgency of addressing these issues. By fostering collaboration between stakeholders and leveraging existing resources, there is an opportunity to transform the Lujzijana Road into a vibrant cultural route that also strengthens the sense of identity and belonging among its residents. The significant lack of funding and the fact that the government is not interested in developing tourism in Gorski Kotar leads to a feeling of isolation and helplessness among the local population, as well as the feeling that they have been forgotten by the institutions, a sense that they are not important.

Gorski Kotar already has a perfect means of getting to these attractions quickly: The Rijeka–Zagreb motorway. While it holds significant potential to positively impact tourism in Gorski Kotar, its actual implementation has fallen short of fully integrating the region's cultural, historical, and natural assets into the travel experience. The motorway has led to the decline of tourism in smaller, rural communities, particularly those that once thrived as rest stops along the old Lujzijana Road. Formerly bustling towns have seen a decrease in visitors, a reduction in local businesses, and a loss of traditional interactions that were central to the area's tourism culture.

The juxtaposition of the Lujzijana Road with the modern Rijeka–Zagreb motorway highlights the

dual nature of development in the region. While the motorway has brought economic benefits through faster travel and enhanced connectivity, it has also overshadowed the historical significance of older routes like Lujzijana Road. The “tunnel effect” of the motorway have created a divide, with urban areas benefiting from the speed and accessibility of the road, while rural areas are left marginalized and disconnected. The lack of coordination between heritage preservation and infrastructural development, underscores missed opportunities for integrating these elements into a cohesive tourism strategy. Optimizing the motorway's potential requires a holistic approach that aligns infrastructure development with tourism strategies that prioritize local heritage and community benefits. By doing so, Gorski Kotar could transform its transit zones into meaningful destinations, leveraging the motorway to drive sustainable tourism growth and regional revitalization. To maximize the benefits of the motorway for the entire region, future efforts should address these disparities by promoting tourism and economic development in the less accessible areas, ensuring that the growth experienced by some does not come at the expense of others.

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