

Quality Systems for Tourism in Protected Areas and Their Application to the Pastures of Pohorje

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The systematic integration of agricultural and tourism products and services from the pastures of Pohorje under the 'From Pohorje' brand ensures consistent quality in both a bottom-up and top-down manner. The stakeholders were involved in (i) three regional workshops, which involved analysis of the supply and demand for general products and services, as well as tourism products, in conjunction with Pohorje's environmentally protected area; (ii) a fourth workshop for establishing supply chains and a marketing approach, and (iii) a fifth workshop for designing action plans for product providers in conjunction with Pohorje pastures. Guidelines have been developed within the ALPA project for ensuring quality and establishing supply chains and marketing for products, tourism services and tourism products in addition to 20 action plans for providers in conjunction with the Pohorje pastures. The pastures represent an excellent starting point for an eco-destination on Pohorje that offers unique experiences. The quality of all products and services must be comprehensively planned, implemented and evaluated. Promoting networking for integration and establishing organized supply chains can provide a critical mass of quality products from and experiences of the Pohorje pastures. Systematic, strategic and operative marketing of the destination ensures that products have a certain 'homey' feel, and are targeted at specific groups. Pohorje Vision 2030 offers an opportunity for developing sustainable management, in which the Pohorje destination acts in concert with the protected area. The public communication system and an efficient point-of-sale network under the 'From Pohorje' trademark can convince stakeholders that investments in the pastures and activities related to them not only pay off but also have a significant multiplier effect.

Keywords: pastures, tourism products, quality system, Vision Pohorje 2030

Introduction

Examples of established green destinations (New Forest National Park, Biosphärenpark Großes Walsertal, Naturpark Almenland, Bohinj, Sečovlje Salina Nature Park, Strunjan Landscape Park, Green Karst, etc.) indicate that in addition to the development and mar-

keting of a destination brand, it is crucial to establish a system for the development, marketing and sales of high quality products, services and tourism products under a collective brand which guarantees the quality and origin of materials and ingredients, as well as added value in the product and service de-

sign (Jurinčič & Popič, 2009; Sovinc, 2012; Jurinčič, Renčelj, Gačnik, & Kerma, 2015; Lešnik Štuhec, Gulič, & Štuhec, 2016). Integration under a common brand, joint promotion and marketing, and a network of established sales outlets, both promise and provide high-quality experiences.

Quality¹ is a very broadly analysed concept (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988; Potočnik, 1998, 2002; Šostar, 2000; Snoj & Gabrijan, 2000; Pregrad & Musil, 2001; Kreže, 2008). Authors usually define quality from (i) the technical-technological perspective, (ii) the economic and market perspective, and (iii) the organizational perspective. Quality is the optimum fulfilment of market demand with regard to six criteria (Šostar, 2000, p. 7): (i) functionality, (ii) reliability, (iii) environmental friendliness, (iv) time of delivery, (v) price, (vi) consulting and maintenance. Snoj & Gabrijan (2000, p. 160) define quality from the marketing point of view as: (i) an objective quality – rational and mechanical and therefore measurable and comparable to established standards; and (ii) a subjective quality – the perceived quality that represents client assessment of excellence in service, that is, as a human subjective reaction that cannot be objectively measured.

A common brand is a special kind of brand intended for use exclusively by various associations, that is, users of the same brand. One of the conditions for the registration of such a brand is a valid policy that establishes the conditions and obligations arising from the use of such a trademark.

The development of Pohorje² has been closely linked to the exploitation of forests for centuries, as well as to agriculture and tourism. The impact of early medieval colonization led to deforestation and ultimately transformed the Pohorje region into extensive pas-

tures. The industrial revolution, with its ironworks, coal mining, and deforestation management, changed the entire image of the landscape. This led to the development of a particular type of cultural landscape with typically individual farms (celki), clustered villages, grasslands, and pastures at high altitudes (Gulič, Lešnik Štuhec, Bedjanič, & Rojs, 2013, p. 29). The Natura 2000 network occupies 33% of the total land at the top of Pohorje, and is home to pastures, raised bogs and other habitats, along with numerous rare animal and plant species.

Pohorje Vision 2030 (Lešnik Štuhec, 2011a), which was created as part of the project NATREG (see <http://www.natreg.eu>), offers opportunities for the sustainable management of Pohorje, in which the Pohorje Regional Park and the wider area (the destination Pohorje) speak with one voice. The story of the unspoiled nature of the alpine pastures and wetlands (Agencija Republike Slovenije za okolje, 2013), raised bogs, excellent views, pastoral farming, and the richness of the local environment, enables a focused solicitation of identified target groups that respect the traditional and sophisticated production and processing of pasture products and want to enjoy indigenous experiences. Pohorje has great potential to make use of the 'From Pohorje' brand to develop into a recognized green destination, which would ensure high-quality culinary products, enjoyed in catering establishments by visitors, who would also receive training by providers in production and processing, and would thus experience the destination with all the senses at every turn, and then be able to take the products home to relive the experience.

Quality of Products, Goods, and Services

Quality management of individual companies, and even of destinations themselves, requires the establishment of quality policies and guidelines, often set forth as quality concepts. The products are of suitable quality once they fulfil the defined requirements, needs, and expectations of consumers (Crosby, 1989; Marolt & Gomišček 2005, p. 2), which is why companies strive to produce products or deliver services better, cheaper, faster and thus make a better impression than their competitors.

¹ The word 'quality' comes from the Latin word 'qualitas', which means a good attribute, value, excellence, characteristic, competence (Potočnik, 2002).

² Pohorje is a 840 km² area in northeastern Slovenia that reaches up to 1,543 m asl. The mountain range extends from the Drava to the Dravinja and Mislinja Valley and includes 16 municipalities with a total population of around 221,500 (Lešnik Štuhec, 2010, p. 8).

In the context of quality policy, it is necessary to achieve certain objectives, the fulfilment of which has to be checked promptly and deviations should be remedied immediately (Lebe, 2012, p. 222).

'Quality management is described as a coordinated set of activities for the leading and directing of an organization in terms of quality.' When an organization implements comprehensive quality management (Total Quality Management (TQM)), it is required to identify and coordinate other systems of partial management or leadership, such as marketing, production, and financial management in order to avoid conflicts in objectives and handling (Lebe, 2012, p. 223).

The approach to improvement is based on three principles: customer focus, continuous improvement process, and teamwork (Dean & Bowen, 1994, p. 394).

The successful management and functioning of a company require quality direction and management in a systematic and transparent manner. The ISO 9000:2002 standard (Slovenski inštitut za standardizacijo, 2002, p. 6) highlights eight principles of quality, namely: (i) customer focus (understanding current and future needs and striving to exceed expectations) (ii) leadership and constancy of purpose (values, ethics, culture, and management structure of the company), (iii) results orientation (satisfaction and balancing of the needs of customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders and society as a whole), (iv) management by processes and facts (recognized, effective and comprehensive system of enterprise management, decision-making based on reliable information), (v) staff development and employee integration (building intellectual capital – personal development, career development of employees), (vi) continuous learning, innovation and improvement (providing the necessary resources, tools, time and opportunities for continuous improvement), (vii) development of partnerships (building mutually beneficial relationships with other organizations based on trust, knowledge sharing and integration), (viii) social responsibility (ethical behavior – concern for stakeholders inside and outside the company).

Models of quality management are usually based on six elements: (i) management – determines the quality policy and objectives, provides resources and

long-term business plans based on observed data; (ii) funds: tangible and intangible funds have to be guaranteed for quality performance; (iii) processes: the necessary basic, leading, and supporting processes have to be identified and the quality of these processes determined; (iv) improvements: continuous striving for success, preventing wastefulness; (v) customers: Quality Management has to be built on the expectations and requirements of customers and others; (vi) employees: train staff so that they will be able to develop appropriate quality awareness and customer relations (Lebe, 2012, p. 223).

Quality techniques (Zollondz, 2001) have to be divided into five groups that correspond to the five phases of the problem cycle: (i) elementary techniques of quality, (ii) qualitative techniques of quality design, (iii) qualitative techniques of quality realization or quality targeting, (iv) qualitative techniques of checking quality; (v) qualitative techniques of quality improvement. Quality techniques for services should assist service providers in determining customer needs, and in avoiding and analysing mistakes. Quality techniques are therefore resources and knowledge – know-how applied in various stages of development to solve specific problems in the field of quality management (Lebe, 2012, p. 226).

The SERVQUAL scale for measuring service quality (Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1993, 1997) covers five dimensions: (i) tangibles (buildings, premises, equipment, location, appearance, staff), (ii) reliability (ability to maintain services carefully, accurately and in accordance with promises), (iii) responsiveness (readiness to assist customers), (iv) assurance (expertise, courtesy of employees, and the ability to evoke feelings of trust and security), and (v) empathy (caring attention given to each client).

Measuring the quality of products/services requires regular and sophisticated monitoring of customer behaviour (Snoj, 1997, 1998). Successful companies focus on the following factors: (i) team design of company structure; (ii) satisfaction of the client's needs and wants, (iii) continuous processes for improvement, (iv) effective leadership, (v) cooperation and staff training, (vi) the broad use of statistical and non-statistical tools (Kreže, 2008, p. 84).

Alpine Pastures – The Plains of Pohorje

Pastures on the ridge of Pohorje emerged in the 17th century due to the residents' need to graze livestock. According to the available data (Hiltl, 1893), more than 700 ha were deforested on the ridge of Pohorje for the needs of agriculture.

The grubbed areas were used by forest workers and farmers for grazing and growing feed for their livestock. The overgrowing of Pohorje pastures began after the Second World War. Due to the deterioration of mountain farms and the migration of the local population in the valley, the need for grazing areas declined. According to legend, the last intensive period of massive grazing lasted from 1980–1986, when up to 800 head of cattle could be found grazing on Pohorje (Beškovnik, 2012). On Kope and Črni Vrh, grazing was also very intensive between 1954 and 1962. Under the auspices of the Agricultural Cooperatives of Slovenj Gradec, up to 500 head of sheep³ and 150 head of cattle could be found grazing here during this period. At that time, the highest areas were used for pasturing, whereas mainly the spatially separated forest clearings were mowed. On the slopes of Kope and Črni Vrh, there were two stables and two shepherd's houses. In 1962 grazing on the plains ended (Hriberšek, 2012).

The use of seasonal pastures for grazing animals in Slovenia is disappearing as the number of animals per farmer is decreasing, and farming is being abandoned in many cases. Therefore, there is enough pasture land in the valleys and around the farms.

As a consequence, the trend in recent years has been toward further overgrowing of the Alpine pastures. Due to current guidelines in agriculture, many pastures are now being grazed by breeds that are economically more profitable than the traditional ones. The way of grazing on the mountains is otherwise de-

termined by the so-called grazing order, which, however, is not always sustainable and can cause degradation of important conservational grasslands.

Another trend is increased tourism: the one-time pastoral huts are being renovated without taking into account the ethnological characteristics of the area and minimal environmental standards (Zavod RS za varstvo narave, 2013).

Within the pilot area, grazing is limited to the Rogla grazing community (14 farmers)⁴ who graze livestock on 53 ha near the Rogla tourist center and within the ALPA pilot area (Ostruščica), along with four individual farmers who graze livestock in the Kope and Črni Vrh project units (Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013b, p. 12).

Despite the relatively heavy burden brought about by major recreational activities (hiking, gathering, driving), one can find here valuable graze lands, quiet zones, winter shelters and areas where some rare and endangered species, such as the wood grouse and black grouse, come to reproduce (Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013b, p. 30).

Pastures or open grasslands within the dense forest areas represent important foraging habitats for wildlife. Grazing livestock, therefore, compete with wildlife in these areas to some extent (Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013b, p. 31).

Recreation and Tourism on Pohorje Pastures

The Pohorje pastures, together with the wetlands, represent a major factor in the development of tourism at Pohorje's summit. Open plains attract many hikers; cyclists come for the Pohorje Cycling Route, and gatherers of mushrooms and medicinal plants visit in

³ Shepherds were circularly grazing their individual sheep herds on separate pastures. They were using the so-called system of Torrs. A Torr is an approximately 30 × 30 m large area enclosed by a wooden fence, where a herd of 100 sheep was grazing for ca. three days, and then the fence was moved to a fresh area (Hriberšek, 2012).

⁴ The shepherds are present on the mountain throughout the grazing season, using a smaller facility in the immediate vicinity of the tourist center Rogla (outside the pilot area). They take the cattle to the pastures between the 15th of May and the 15th of June, and back to the valley between the 15th of September and the 15th of November. The time of the grazing season depends on the presence of snow, air temperature and growing conditions on the grasslands where grazing is being carried out. On average, a grazing season lasts for 127 days (Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013b, pp. 15–18).

the summer time. In the winter Kope and Rogla offer ski slopes and cross-country trails for cross-country skiing, Nordic skiing, walking with snowshoes, and similar activities. (Lešnik Štuhec, 2015, p. 12). Due to the conservation of nature and the social value of the pastures, it is necessary to pay particular attention to how visitors interact with the environment. This role should be taken over by the park operator. With the planned establishment of informational and interpretive infrastructure, it is possible to redirect visitors from the most vulnerable areas to those that are already degraded and can withstand a higher degree of usage (Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013b, p. 34). Existing tourism on southern and eastern Pohorje presently includes tourist and excursion farms, organic farms, mountain huts and homes, hotels and other accommodation, restaurants and other gastronomy businesses, recreation and sports facilities (ski slopes, etc.), and hiking, tourism, and other societies. Most are concentrated in two centres: Rogla and Kope, along with Ribnica na Pohorju.

Project ALPA – Managing Pastures

In 2004, Slovenia's protected areas were registered in the Natura 2000 network. As part of the NATREG project, the Slovene Institute for Nature Conservation initiated measures to have the Pohorje area designated as a regional park (IUCN category V). Additional projects at Pohorje's summit addressed issues related to the pastures (ALPA, see <http://www.projektalpa.si>) and wetlands (WETMAN, see <http://www.wetman.si>) as well as to the conflicts among various stakeholders on Pohorje (SUPPORT, see <http://www.projektipohorja.si/en/project-support/>).

The development and marketing of nature tourism and cultural heritage is described in Lešnik Štuhec (2011a), based on the Protected Area Stakeholder Impact Management Model – PASIMM (Lešnik Štuhec, 2011b) and in Lešnik Štuhec (2010).

Pohorje Vision 2030 proposes the establishment of the Pohorje Regional Park with three centers (Bolfenk, Rogla and Kope) and two park offices (Ribnica on Pohorje and Trije Kralji), concentrated around the cooperation among stakeholders in the associated organizations that subscribe to the vision (Pohorje Regional

Park, Pohorje DMO, Pohorje Stakeholders Community). One of the operative objectives of the strategic goal Sustainable Green Tourism and Targeted Visitors strategy is the development of high quality local products and services. Achieving comprehensive quality requires networking and the cooperation of providers in the supply and value chains with the objective of building a critical mass of quality tourism and other products and services, all under the collective 'From Pohorje' trademark.

The Sustainable Management of Pastures in Protected Areas (ALPA) project is an extension of the NATREG project. In Slovenia, the alpine areas with a long agricultural tradition are in many cases becoming overgrown, a fact which, on the one hand, represents a changing cultural landscape, and on the other, means the loss of some native plant and animal species, some of them protected. At the same time, hikers have become increasingly numerous, meaning that the interests of tourism and agriculture interact in the affected areas.

The ALPA project focuses on the sustainable management of mountain grasslands. The pilot area of the Pohorje plains extends from Kope on the west to Ostruščica in the east. The core objectives of the project were: (i) to clean up overgrown areas and return them to extensive agricultural use, and (ii) to develop tourism products and services that would contribute to the development of additional activities on farms.

Aside from the challenges presented by contemporary trends in tourism, tourists themselves are becoming increasingly demanding, meaning that they appreciate the tradition, uniqueness, and authenticity that still exist in the mountains. The need to help residents, especially farmers, so they would find motivation and ways to survive in their environment as well as contribute to the short supply chains has been highlighted.

Therefore, the third of the five operative objectives of the ALPA project reads as follows: 'The development and establishment of quality and sustainable tourist services in the mountains, and the promotion of product development and marketing in/for the alpine pastures' (Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013a).

Quality Systems for Natural and Experiential Tourism Products and Services from Protected Areas

IUCN (1991) defines a protected area as one dedicated primarily to the protection and enjoyment of natural or cultural heritage, to the maintenance of biodiversity and/or ecological support services. The creation of such an area is now the most universally adopted means of conserving a natural ecosystem and/or relevant cultural heritage for a broad range of human values. International Union for Conservation of Nature (as cited in Butler, 1992) advocate nine characteristics of ecotourism:

1. It promotes positive environmental ethics and fosters 'preferred' behavior in its participants;
2. It does not degrade the resource (hunting and fishing for sport may be classified as wildland [green] tourism, but they are most aptly classified as experiential tourism, rather than ecotourism.);
3. It concentrates on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values;
4. It is centered around the environment in question, and not around man;
5. It must benefit the wildlife and environment. The question of whether or not the environment (not just people) has received 'benefits' can be measured socially, economically, scientifically, managerially, and politically; at a minimum, the environment must attain a net benefit, contributing to its sustainability and ecological integrity;
6. It provides a first-hand encounter with the natural environment (and with any accompanying cultural elements found in undeveloped areas). Visitor centers and on-site interpretive slide shows can be considered to form part of an ecotourism activity only if they direct people to a first-hand experience;
7. It actively involves local communities in the tourism process so that they may benefit from it, thereby contributing to a better valuation of the natural resources in that locality;
8. The level of gratification in experiential tourism is measured in terms of education and/or appre-

ciation rather than in thrill-seeking or physical achievement;

9. It involves considerable preparation and demands in-depth knowledge on the part of both leaders and participants. The satisfaction derived from the experience is felt and expressed strongly in emotional and inspirational ways.

Following the guidelines of the ALPA project, experiences under the collective trademark 'From Pohorje' were developed to ensure the quality of experiential tourism in the alpine pastures. These were based on two objectives: (i) to develop and implement quality and sustainable tourism products and services in the mountains and encourage the development and marketing of pasture products, and (ii) to contribute to the development of supplementary activities on farms, making the conservation of pastures economically sustainable (Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013a). The document 'Expert Guidelines for the Creation of Action Plans for Quality Products, Tourism Services and Tourism Products in the Area of Pohorje' (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013) provides guidelines for the development, promotion, marketing, implementation and evaluation of quality, sustainable tourism and other products and services with local added value.

The Quality Assurance System for the 'From Pohorje' Collective Trademark

The matrix of criteria for products from the alpine pastures describes the following elements of quality: (i) ingredients are local; (ii) ingredients are processed locally; (iii) production is carried out according to traditional methods; (iv) legal regulations are taken into account (e.g. hygiene standards for food); (v) production is sustainable and based on two descriptive criteria: the product is (i) typical of the region, and (ii) an innovative regional product (Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013a). Table 1 presents the guidelines for the pasture product quality system.

The Quality Assurance System for Offering Services under the 'From Pohorje' Collective Trademark

Guidelines for the development and quality of tourism services and tourism products in the mountains, are

Table 1 Guidelines for Pasture Product Quality System

Guideline content	Findings
G1 Verify whether the product meets the conditions set out in the product criteria matrix.	Product is/is not suitable for marketing in the geographical area – must be at least 50% in compliance with certain quality and descriptive criteria.
G2 Create a description of the product manufacturing process, along with the required documentation.	Description of, for example, traditional recipes, certain methods of construction, and control mechanisms embedded in the manufacturing process to ensure the highest possible quality level.
G3 Description of product components.	Description of components serves as comprehensive quality assurance. If the ingredients of the product do not meet the guidelines, selling it under the brand name is not allowed.
G4 Description of applicable legal standards.	Legal quality assurance standards – applicable regulations (e.g. food hygiene) and certain additional criteria for individual products, which are required for selling in the protected area.
G5 Description of the marketing strategy based on the marketing mix and sales channels – established local networks.	Description of the marketing strategy, including possible cooperation with regional shops, craft enterprises, and representatives of protected areas. Steps: (i) identify major manufacturers and their products, services, and marketing channels in the region; (ii) delineate approximate conditions for the marketing of regional products in the context of tourism; (iii) provide an overview of legal requirements for the marketing of regional products to the target group; (iv) estimate hypothetical sales through customer surveys; (v) prepare informational materials for consumers; (vi) create a promotional sales network and logistics structure.
G6 Performance control – costing and price design.	The economic performance of the product in the market is measured by the income statement – the positive or negative difference between sales price and the cost (calculation of production costs and a premium for the coverage of marketing and sales).

Notes Adapted from Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave (2013a).

based on ten principles for sustainable tourism in protected areas (EUROPARC Federation, 2010), which dictate: (i) the creation of a strong partnership for the development and management of protected areas; (ii) development and implementation of a tourism strategy and action plan for protected areas; (iii) protection and enhancement of natural and cultural heritage for and through tourism, and their protection from excessive development; (iv) provision of excellent experiences for the tourist at all levels; (v) effective communication to visitors about the special value of the area; (vi) encouragement of the development of specific products, tourism services, and tourism products that promote discovery and understanding of the area; (vii) increase knowledge of protected areas and sustainable development among all key stakeholders; (viii) steps to ensure that tourism strengthens and does not undermine the quality of life of the local population; (ix) an increase in benefits from tourism for the

local economy; (x) monitoring and influencing of the influx of tourists in order to reduce negative impacts on the environment.

For the proper functioning of the pasture areas, it is necessary to establish a strategy for the development and marketing of tourism in the protected area and an action plan for each service or tourism product tailored to the protection regime.

Elements of the development and marketing strategy for the protected area (the pastures) (adapted from Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013a):

1. Analysis of strengths and weaknesses of tourism in the protected area;
2. Analysis of opportunities and risks of tourism development in the protected area;
3. Creation of a tourism development and marketing strategy incorporating the guidelines for product and service quality as provided in the

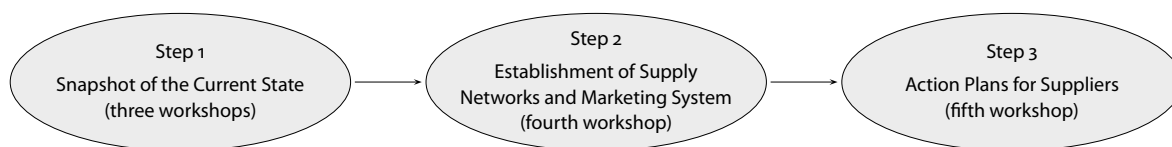


Figure 1 The Quality System Development Model for the Alpine Pastures

European Charter for Sustainable Tourism Development in Protected Areas;

4. Creation of an action plan for the development and marketing of tourism for a limited period in accordance with the development strategy;
5. Implementation of the action plan;
6. Continuous monitoring, evaluating and adjusting of goals and activities.

Elements of the action plan for the development and marketing of individual providers and products (adapted from Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave, 2013a):

1. Summary of action plan content;
2. General description of company;
3. The vision of the company's future business in accordance with the development of new, quality tourism and other products and services;
4. Marketing strategy for new products and services related to Pohorje pastures and grasslands;
5. Definition of investment – development and marketing of new products/services/tourism products;
6. Development and marketing plan for new, quality products and services related to Pohorje pastures and grasslands: quality criteria; quality principles; marketing mix; establishment of a supply network;
7. Financing of investments;
8. Composition of the action plan development group;
9. List of references;
10. Annex 1: Guidelines for the development and marketing of products/tourism services/tourism products related to Pohorje pastures and grasslands;

11. Annex 2: Calculation of selling prices for products/tourism services/tourism products related to Pohorje pastures and grasslands;

Quality criteria for tourism and other products and services – experiential 'From Pohorje' programs ensure the sustainability necessary for any Natura 2000 protected area. Customers prefer to buy products, services, or experiential holistic tourism programs if the supply chain is short, i.e., local and from channels with recognized producers or providers of services and programs that encompass an extensive range of rural destinations. The matrix of quality criteria for services and tourism products in the pastures consists of nine steps and is presented in Table 2.

Quality guidelines for 'From Pohorje' experiential tourism programs constitute a starting point for specific products/tourism services/tourism programs, as they stem from guidelines that have been developed for protected rural alpine destinations.

The marketing mix develops 'From Pohorje' experiential programs in depth, determines the price based on quality, and defines the channels for bringing it to the customer (direct or indirect sales), as well as how to market it. It addresses the needs of employees, suppliers, and potential target groups, establishes manufacturing, marketing and sales standards, and determines what constitutes physical proof of the existence and visibility of the product.

The establishment of supply networks explains the networking strategy: integration to ensure comprehensive product and service quality and marketing for the Pohorje destination via the coordination of the 'From Pohorje Quality Center.'

Methodology

The quality system development model for the alpine pastures consists of three steps (Figure 1).

In the first step, an analysis of the existing supply and demand for tourism products and services in as-

Table 2 Quality System Guidelines for Pasture Tourism Services

Step/guideline content	Findings
1 Positive effects on the natural and cultural heritage of the mountains	Service supports and ensures the preservation of cultural landscapes, habitats, and biocenoses, which developed from the traditional agricultural cultivation of the mountains; also supports maintenance of authentic mountain cultures. Activities requiring non-renewable energy sources and causing unnecessary waste and noise are limited. Service has no adverse effects on animal and plant life in the mountains.
2 Connection with the mountain area/region	Service builds on knowledge of visitors to the mountains with high-quality, accessible and comprehensible information on the management of the mountains and the particularities of natural conditions in the region. Information is made available to tourists, residents, and educational institutions (schools).
3 Innovative tourism products and services	Service is innovative and contributes to the identification and understanding of the natural and cultural heritage and economic development of mountain areas. Services involve activities, events, and programs related to natural and cultural heritage.
4 Recognition among the local population	Service improves the quality of life of the locals. Local (mountain) communities are involved in the preparation of tourism development plans. Communication is facilitated between and among the managers of protected areas, visitors, representatives of tourist facilities, and overseers of mountains and pastures. Disputes settled by agreement.
5 Added value for farms	Service supports selling domestic alpine products to tourists and tourism businesses, i.e. products manufactured on the mountain (e.g. milk, cheese, butter, etc.) or on farms in the valley (food, local crafts, services). Service promotes the creation of new green jobs for the locals.
6 Sustainability	Service does not destroy its resources. Negative effects of tourism are prevented by visitor management. Number of visitors (spatially and temporally) is taken into account in preparing the management plan. Service supports soft mobility (public transport, hiking, horseback riding, etc.).
7 Moderate/bearable number of visitors	Different categories of protected areas allow different types of tourism services with regard to visitation rate. In intensive forms of tourism on the mountains, visitation management is of particular importance during grazing season to prevent incidents between animals and visitors.
8 High investment costs	Estimated costs of investment depend on the category of the protected area and the chosen strategy for tourism development. The matrix contains financial (investment and maintenance), in addition to quality criteria.
9 High maintenance costs/large number of employees	Assessment of maintenance costs and the number of employees required for the new service.

Notes Adapted from from Zavod Republike Slovenije za varstvo narave (2013a).

sociation with the Pohorje alpine pastures was conducted based on:

1. The preliminary research defined in the document 'Vision of Sustainable Development of a "Green" Offer (nature and cultural heritage) in the Tourism (project) Area Pohorje 2030,' which was created as part of the NATREG project under the slogan 'Managing Natural Assets and Protected Areas as Sustainable Regional Development Opportunities' (Lešnik Štuhec, 2011a);

2. Workshops: three workshops with stakeholders of the Pohorje pastures project area in its three component regions: Rogla, Kope and Ribniško-Lovrenško Pohorje.

The second step consisted of:

1. 'Expertise-based guidelines for product and tourism service quality on the Alpine pastures,' and
2. the 7 Ps of the marketing mix.

In cooperation with the stakeholders, the following were developed in the fourth workshop:

3. supply networks;
4. possible marketing strategies for products, tourism services and tourism products from the Pohorje pastures, based on the 7 Ps of marketing mix (Kotler, 2004, pp. 406-661; Konečnik Ruzzier, 2010, pp. 90-133), which aid the stakeholders in creating their own business (action) plans for quality products, tourism services, and tourism products in conjunction with the Pohorje pastures and grasslands.

Examples were designed for five selected products, two tourism services, and three tourism products.

In the third step, action plans for the preceding were designed in association with the stakeholders.

The methodology used in the research included quantitative and qualitative research. The quantitative research provided information about the frequency of occurrence of products, tourism services, and tourism products in the area; the qualitative research analyzed the general characteristics of the products, tourism services and tourism products, as well as the demand for them, as determined in three workshops with Pohorje's stakeholders (Rogla, Kope, Ribniško-Lovrenško Pohorje).

This was followed up by the creation of a set of potential products, tourism services and tourism products in accordance with the relevant guidelines, whose existence was confirmed at the fourth joint workshop with the stakeholders of the Pohorje pastures region.

They were presented with a vision of the potential synergic effects that could be achieved through the creation of a Quality Center under the brand name 'From Pohorje.'

Based on all these findings, two documents were created: 'Professional Basis for the Creation of Action Plans for Quality Products, Tourism Services and Tourism Products in the Pohorje Region' and 'Template for the Creation of Action Plans.'

At the fifth workshop, stakeholders received guidance in developing their own action plans and thus upgraded existing quality products, tourism services, and tourism products and created new ones. Project activities culminated in the creation of 'Action Plans xy for Smaller Companies with a Focus on the Planning

of Development and Marketing for Products/Tourism Services/Tourism Products in Conjunction with the Pohorje Pastures and Grasslands.'

Results

A Snapshot of Pohorje Pastures Products and Services

The existing goods produced in and around the pastures of Zreško Pohorje, Kope and Ribniško-Lovrenško Pohorje comprised: (i) natural resources (forests and plains woods, etc. vegetation, animals, clean air and pleasant climate, peace, landscape with grazing livestock, wild berries and fruits, herbs and grasses, etc.); (ii) harvests (grass, hay, herbs, berries and fruits, etc.); (iii) products (from: meat, milk, wild berries and fruits, herbs, grasses, wood, etc.); (iv) tourism services (recreation: walking, cycling, horseback riding, rest and relaxation, health, rehabilitation, welfare, education, awareness, cooking, etc.); (v) tourism products (camps, hiking trails, events, guided activities such as horseback riding, cycling tours, etc. and programs on such topics as orientation, survival, understanding of nature, bread-baking workshops, etc.). The positive and negative aspects of these have been revealed (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, p. 16).

A snapshot of the products from raw materials produced in conjunction with the Pohorje pastures (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, pp. 16-19):

- Meat from young cattle – Pohorje beef, Pohorje *bunka* and salami, venison salami;
- Dairy products – Pohorje cheese, cottage cheese, sour milk;
- Marmalades – strawberry, raspberry, other berries;
- Products from apples – apple juice, dried fruit, vinegar, apple cider;
- Herbs, spices, teas, syrups – for example from spruce tips, etc.;
- Spirits – blueberry, pear, fruit brandy, herb brandy, honey brandy, etc.;
- Sheaves, pillows, and cushions made from Pohorje grasses and herbs;
- Natural soaps made with herbs grown on Pohorje;

- Pohorje woods – spruce *šiklni* and other small wooden products – clogs, bird houses and hatcheries, bowls, trays and plates, toys;
- Knitted products – baskets, etc.

A snapshot of the tourism services and tourism products offered in conjunction with pastures on Pohorje (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, pp. 20–21):

- Networks of relatively well-regulated Alpine, hiking, cycling, and horseback riding trails, which enable visitors to explore the area on their own or with a guide provided by Alpine, tourism, equestrian and other associations and tourism providers;
- The thematic and educational forest paths, maintained by the representatives of the Forestry Institute, along with Alpine, tourism and other associations, who also provide guided tours;
- Camps for young explorers;
- Workshops, especially culinary;
- Events, especially culinary at the peak and in the foothills of Pohorje;
- Farms with supplementary activities – tourist farms with accommodation and excursion farms with culinary products and on-site accommodation, occasionally also comprehensive thematic tourism packages and experiential programs at the foot of the mountain;
- Hospitality businesses – hotels, bed & breakfasts, camping sites, mountain chalets and hostels, all of which offer accommodation and meals as well as recreation (especially skiing), wellness services and cultural and sports entertainment;
- Catering and other culinary businesses – restaurants, pubs, snack bars, tourist farms and wineries offering a broad range of gastronomic products and services with a local flavour;
- Businesses for sport and recreation, which manage the infrastructure on the ski slopes and offer tickets for the gondola, chairlifts, and ski lifts in the winter and summer.

A Snapshot of the Demand in Conjunction with Pohorje Pastures

The existing demand for tourism and other products and services from the Pohorje pastures is presented below.

A snapshot of the demand for products connected with the Pohorje pastures (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, pp. 22–23):

- Residents – locals who buy the products directly from farms or at farmers' markets and use them for consumption;
- Public institutions – homes for the elderly, schools, kindergartens, etc. that purchase food and beverages from nearby farms and processors for use in daily lunch programs for school children and the elderly;
- Tourism businesses that purchase food and beverages from nearby farms and processors for use in gastronomy and handcrafted products for tourists;
- Large and small specialized retail businesses that include agricultural and other products in their inventories;
- Other businesses which buy these products for use in producing their products with local added value;
- Hikers which buy the products as food or process them into food and consume them or take them home as a souvenir;
- Travellers which consume the products as food or beverages as part of a gastronomic tourism program or buy them as food or process them into food and consume them or take them home as a souvenir from the destination, etc.

A snapshot of the demand for services and tourism products connected with the Pohorje pastures (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, pp. 23–25):

- Residents – locals who use the network of alpine, hiking, cycling and horseback riding trails for relaxation and recreation; attend workshops, hikes, camps and events; experience thematic trails with guides; visit wellness centers with programs that include products from the Pohorje pastures; or

who enjoy the offerings of gastronomy businesses, etc.;

- Public institutions – homes for the elderly, schools, kindergartens, etc., in the Pohorje region and beyond which include tourism services such as organized hikes, camps, events, experiences on thematic trails with guides, etc. in (educational) programs for children, school children and the elderly;
- Tourism businesses with demand for tourism services from other providers (organized hikes, events, workshops, meetings for spiritual growth, cultural events, experiences on theme trails with guides, etc.) and involve them in own programs for their guests;
- Tourism information centers that present the tourism services on their websites to attract potential organized groups and individuals, as well as those already at the destination, who are looking for excursions and other short adventures/ tourism products on Pohorje;
- Tourism agencies and other intermediaries that integrate tourism products and services and market them on their own or through other intermediaries on the tourism market;
- Hikers who buy tourism services as part of an excursion, giving them a comprehensive experience of the destination;
- Travelers who buy tourism products and/or services as a pleasant memory of the destination, etc.

SWOT Analysis of the Market Connected with the Pohorje Pastures

Three workshops were conducted with the stakeholders of Pohorje: one for the pasture area on Rogla in Zreče on the 15th of January, 2013 (41 participants), one for the pasture area on Kope in Mislinja on the 22nd of February, 2013 (43 participants), and one for the pasture area on Ribniško-Lovrenško Pohorje in Ribnica na Pohorju on the 15th of February, 2013 (23 participants). As part of these workshops, the stakeholders evaluated and ranked the elements of the SWOT analysis of Pohorje pastures and grasslands development and marketing.

Market strengths relevant to the Pohorje pastures (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, pp. 26–27):

- Preserved nature, a healthy climate, and a distinctive cultural landscape with beautiful views.
- Rich history, cultural heritage and experiences of the economic production of previous eras (production of *šikli*, charcoal burning on pastures, glassworks, quarrying, skidding the wood with slides, rafting, herbalism, etc.) and traditional farming on Pohorje, kept alive by some societies and individuals.
- Favourable conditions (relatively well-established Alpine, hiking and cycling trails, accommodation capacities, and recreational infrastructure) for a diverse enjoyment of the area (hiking, cycling, life on the farm, experiential programs in nature, climate tourism).
- Availability of local raw materials (wood, hay, meat, stone, herbs, berries, etc.) and the great potential for future local products from the Pohorje pastures (herbs, meats from grazing livestock and game, thematic experiences, etc.).
- Traditional and recognized culinary products (Pohorje stew, Pohorje *bunka*, mushroom soup, *bogajca*, beef, blueberry brandy, the Pohorje omelette, etc.).
- Proximity to major cities, high potential for domestic and international markets, and relatively good accessibility.
- Year-round tourism linked to major tourism centres with a variety of types of accommodation, cuisine, sports and leisure, wellness, and other infrastructure. Smaller providers enrich the local services, which are suitable for different target groups.
- Friendly locals and employees in tourism and tourism-related activities attract even the most discerning guests.

Market weaknesses relevant to the Pohorje pastures (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, pp. 27–28):

- Incoherent and decentralized operating of suppliers and consumers (self-sufficiency and individualism, no connecting link for the establish-

ment of organized supply chains and integrated marketing activities.

- Low production (no market surpluses, no critical mass of organic production), no registered supplementary activities on farms (the gray economy represents unfair competition for those who produce and sell legally), poor diversification and specialization, few products with local added value.
- Unfavorable age structure on farms; poor self-image of young people who are not willing to take risks; little entrepreneurial initiative; no pride in the traditions; lack of innovation.
- Long and complicated procedures for obtaining permits, authorizations, approvals and document management for infrastructure projects in rural areas.
- No interest in deepening the range of products and services for tourists.
- Untapped potential for environmental and cultural heritage experiences in the Pohorje pastures for tourist purposes (no created experiential tourism products).
- Incompetence in marketing and selling; lack of knowledge, infrastructure, and/or funding; no systematic collective or destination branding.
- Few products certified or nationally recognized; round timber exported without local added value.
- Separation of the area into five micro-locations (Mariborsko Pohorje, Slovenjebistriško Pohorje, Rogla, Kope, Ribniško Pohorje); limitations due to regional (3 regions) and municipal borders (17 municipalities) and affecting professional services, LAS projects, and the acquisition of investment funds, etc.
- Lack of the basic infrastructure that would attract the young to the countryside.
- Low purchasing power of tourists; low level of spending and shorter stays; few individual tourists.

Market opportunities with implications for the Pohorje pastures (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, pp. 28–29):

- Promotion of eco- and sustainable tourism on pastures and grasslands; experiences for specific target groups of tourists led by excellent guides, and tourist farms with in-depth programs: programs for experiencing pristine nature; Natura 2000, getting to know ecosystems and their geological composition, observation of the night sky and the stars; nature-focused educational programs – the barefoot hiking trail, sensory trail etc.; awareness programs, environmental education; experiential ethnology programs; agricultural activities (traditional grains, Pohorje cabbage, and other crops), grazing, milking, mowing, gathering mushrooms and berries, traditional economic activities (logging, glassworks, charcoal burning, making of *šiklni*, etc.); culinary programs, workshops, paths, events, etc.; outdoor recreational programs in nature (cross-country skiing, Nordic walking, snowshoeing, etc.); outdoor stress-reduction programs (yoga, meditation, relaxation, observing the nature, etc.); outdoor creativity programs (photography, painting and other workshops, etc.).
- Greater focus on farms on organic and integrated production (alpine grazing of cattle, sheep and goats, poultry and game; mowing hay, cultivation of herbs, wood, etc.) and the (related) processing of locally produced harvests into certified products (organic beef, lamb, poultry and game; dried meat products; milk and dairy products; eggs; marmalades, teas, products made of hay and herbs; timber, resonant wood, charcoal, etc.) with high local added value.
- Linking of farms and other providers and their products and services into an organized supply chain with a comprehensive marketing and sales strategy under a collective trademark which ensures the promised quality for the price.
- Upgrade of the existing tourism and basic infrastructure such that it lends itself to experiential and climate-friendly activities while ensuring accessibility to all target groups; cooperation among tourism centres in all seasons.
- Stakeholder training for working in supply chains,

creating comprehensive marketing and sales promotions, etc.

Market threats with implications for the Pohorje pastures (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, p. 29):

- Damage to pasture ecosystem from restrictions to wildlife habitats and excessive exploitation of natural resources (intensive grazing, fertilizing, harvesting) and influence of people (damage to protected plants, disposal of waste in the wild) and their recreational activities (mass tourism, noise, snowmobiles, four-wheelers, hunting, and similar.).
- Lack of stakeholder interest in entrepreneurial innovation, integration, creation and innovation, and individual performance on the market in competition with well-connected and collectively marketed destinations that offer more value for the money.
- Inadequate legislation, the procedural complexity of fund allocation, high application costs, demanding documentation discourages young people from employment in agriculture.
- Lack of control/disorganized nature conservation department, inadequate monitoring, inadequate spatial planning, pollution of water resources and the environment.
- Intensification of the global economic crisis, with large retail chains and suppliers outside the region offering low prices via an organized supply chain that stifles the local self-sufficiency.
- Farms jeopardized by climate changes, natural disasters, etc. (green winters, hailstorms, animal diseases), accidents (poisoning, rooting of wild pigs), people not being informed about the importance of environmental preservation and the political crisis.
- Abandonment of farms and resulting overgrowing of landscapes, poor maintenance (inadequate mechanical logging and mowing) and cultural heritage preservation.
- The future disconnectedness of the regions within the Pohorje area and dissipation of resources that could otherwise be used for joint projects

connecting the various regions into a competitive green destination.

The products, tourism services, and tourism products from the Pohorje pastures differ among the three micro destinations (Rogla, Kope, and Ribniško-Lovrenško Pohorje) with regard to the quality and diversity of infrastructure, as well as availability in different seasons. For tourism providers, winter is still the primary season (skiing, cross country skiing, snowboarding, and the more traditional recreational activities such as pležuharjenje, snowshoeing, and 'vintage' skiing). Rogla is the most developed of these areas, followed by Kope and Ribnica na Pohorju. Outside the winter season, utilization capacity is very low. Agricultural and other products connected with the Pohorje pastures are not yet widely recognized. The pastures certainly have great potential. Unfortunately, they have not yet been recognized as an opportunity for developing comprehensive and unique tourism services and tourism products, which, if properly marketed, could reach and attract those target groups that are prepared to pay more for the authenticity of experience and local added value. The fear is that similar destinations with more innovative, in-depth experiences at a comparable price would outstrip Pohorje providers in reaching the target groups.

Conclusions

Pastures and grasslands on Pohorje offer great potential for the development of individual and experiential products and tourism services for various target groups of consumers.

Among others, the following activities have been developed as part of the ALPA project: (i) a snapshot of the alpine pastures – pastures on Pohorje; (ii) supply and demand analysis for products, tourism services and tourism products connected with the Pohorje pastures; (iii) potential tourism and tourism-related products, tourism services and tourism products; (iv) a networking and marketing plan for the Pohorje pastures; (v) expert guidelines for the quality assurance, and (vi) specific guidelines for the development and marketing of five products, two tourism services, and three tourism products connected with the Pohorje pastures and grasslands. A special annex

with the title: Action Plan *xy* for Smaller Companies with a Focus on the Development and Marketing of a Product/Tourism Services/Tourism Products connected with the Pohorje Pastures and Grasslands now offers assistance to every interested entrepreneur in the creation of a business plan for upgrading such own products, tourism services, and tourism products (Lešnik Štuhec, 2013, p. 9). From this, 20 new action plans have been developed by providers, all of which have been successful on the market for the past several years.

Local providers will only be able to cope with competition from similar destinations on the Slovenian and international tourism markets if they are organized into partnerships, i.e. growers and producers of goods, and providers of services and experiential tourism products. A unified Pohorje with protected environment and cultural heritage on its summit can raise awareness among local residents and the general public as to the importance of Pohorje as a green destination worth preserving, visiting, and experiencing in-depth under the collective 'From Pohorje' trademark that guarantees the expectations of even the most demanding visitors will be met.

Establishing the 'From Pohorje Quality Centre' is key for ensuring a comprehensively organized range of products, tourism services, and tourism products from Pohorje with a recognized collective and destination trademark. The activities of the center would: (i) aid providers in the development, marketing, and sales of agricultural and other products, tourism services, and experiential tourism; (ii) establish a system for managing the destination and the 'From Pohorje' trademark; (iii) establish quality evaluation and maintenance system; (iv) encourage providers to network and participate in local/regional supply chains; (v) encourage entrepreneurial innovation with high local added value; (vi) encourage providers to maintain a critical mass of the 'From Pohorje' products and services at the desired quality level, (vii) allow for the unified and organized use of the 'From Pohorje' trademark, thereby achieving recognition of the destination and, as a result of the synergic effects of cooperation, an easier networking process with supply chains in and beyond the Pohorje destination; (viii) encour-

age providers to proudly promote the 'From Pohorje' brand and build the trademark in accordance with the 'Comprehensive Communication "From Pohorje" Brand Image Policy'; (ix) make possible the planned and comprehensive exploitation of project funds for upgrading the activities of the 'From Pohorje Quality Center,' which, in turn, would lead to further development of the brand and its overall image, as well as of the logistical, marketing and sales systems; (x) enhance targeted acquisition of project funds for partnerships producing joint products, tourism services, and tourism products, along with marketing, employee training, research and development, etc.; (xi) preserve the pastures and activities related to them for the next generations while satisfying investors, producers and processors, tourism operators, intermediaries, and local residents and visitors to Pohorje.

These activities will require both a solid foundation of expertise and a consensus among various stakeholders. We must strive to ensure that the activities of multi-annual project operations on Pohorje will not be hindered by a lack of vision in development opportunities or the shared vision of the stakeholders in Pohorje's three regions or in the country as a whole.

As an integral part of the management plan for the pilot, the area developed as part of the transnational NATREG project, Pohorje Vision 2030 and all follow-up projects are competitive not just in Europe, but worldwide.

Over the next decade, green tourism should be based on a coordinated development of the three park centers (Bolfenk, Rogla and Kope) and a number of smaller areas on Pohorje, which will collectively work to create the nature-based experiences demanded by hikers, bikers, researchers, children and youth in research and experiential camps and workshops, families with children and couples, and other consumers.

Such experiences will be developed through inter-related programs, such as uniformly regulated recreational (hiking, biking, etc.) and adventure trails with both scientific (nature gardens network, network of natural values) and ethnological content (outdoor museum network for glassworks, smitheries, sawmills, etc.), a network of cultural heritage units (sacral heritage), network of museums and exhibitions, etc., as

well as a network of adventure eco- and glamping camps with a focus on the ethnology and/or natural heritage of the area (e.g. in the 'treetop hotel,' in sko-rjanke, the forest railway wagons, stonecutting sheds, etc.). Also of great importance is the Pohorje Ecofarms network as one of the horizontal networks for the mutual communication, cooperation, and specialization of similar providers in order to raise their competitiveness and enhance production of the critical mass of farm products with the 'From Pohorje' label. Thus, the ecofarms will meet the needs of tourism businesses and ensure both the self-sufficiency of Pohorje and recognition of its Pohorje meat and dairy products, herbs, etc., which will be consumed by visitors and taken home as a memory of a unique experience which they will want to relive in the future.

The For Pohorje Group strives to ensure that these activities would be based on the networking of key stakeholders on Pohorje belonging to the four-party partnership comprised of the economy, local community, non-governmental organizations, and other supporting institutions. It further seeks to develop sustainable tourism services and products and green marketing activities, to ensure that stakeholders will identify the opportunities available at the Pohorje destination, including the protected area. Thus, even in the earliest stages of establishing the protected area and its hinterland, the 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' approaches have already been met with a high degree of public involvement.

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