Chapter 6
Nature-based tourism in the eastern part of Kraški Rob: an overview of current situation and future prospects

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Abstract

In this chapter, recent literature on nature-based tourism is discussed in terms of its potential in the eastern part of Kraški Rob, in terms of characteristics and natural features of touristic interest. Kraški Rob is a geomorphological structural stage north of Slovenian Istria. It is an area of high ecological interest and parts of it have been declared Natura 2000 sites. It is rural, sparsely inhabited, and characterised by aging and declining population trends. In recent years it has begun to attract a growing number of hikers and other visitors, but still remains at the fringe in terms of regional development. Data collected from three villages—Zazid, Rakitovec, and Podpeč—is reported and an adapted version of the two-dimensional model suggested by Fredman et al. (naturalness and accessibility) has been applied to the analysis. Additionally, three features that stand out most for each of the selected villages have been identified and summarised.

Key words: nature-based tourism, leisure, sustainability, accessibility, naturalness, Kraški Rob, Slovenia

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Introduction

With the growth of interest for more sustainable approaches to regional development, and the subsequent placement of nature, and natural amenities, at the centre of local development, nature-based tourism has begun to gain traction in policy and practice. Since the early 1990s, academic literature has discussed the potential of nature-based tourism and its heavy dependency on natural amenities. Many definitions of nature-based tourism exist. In this chapter, we define nature-based tourism as including activities that take place within, and depend on, nature and natural sites and are generally undertaken far from a person's home.

The international academic debate on nature-based tourism has been developing steadily. There are many case studies from Northern European countries, where specific ideas of nature and wilderness are explored (See: Björk, 2000; Lundmark and Müller, 2010; Wall-Reinius and Bäck, 2011; Fredman et al., 2012; Margaryan and Fredman 2017; Øian et al., 2018). There is also a growing amount of empirical work from other regions within and beyond Europe (Agapito et al., 2012; Kim et. al., 2019). However, not very much has been written about nature-based tourism in Slovenia, despite tourism in Slovenia being historically linked, in one way or another, to nature and its features. It is worth noting how, over the past decades, Slovenia has been branded as a green destination at the centre of the "beautiful and pristine" Alps. It is thus interesting to note how little has been pursued in terms of theoretical and empirical systematic academic inquiry into this subject.

To that end, the tools and approaches found in literature regarding nature-based tourism are of great help for a more comprehensive study of tourism, and for an elaboration of ideas about experiences in nature, how nature matters to people, and potential uses of natural amenities in a local context for more sustainable futures. Frameworks from within this body of literature allow for in-depth analyses and also offer useful insight for regional policy-makers to strengthen the role of Slovenia as a green tourist destination. In this chapter, we seek to further elaborate on this. To do this, we looked to the most recent literature on nature-based tourism in order to develop an empirical analysis focused on Kraški Rob, an area of substantial natural value located in the southwest of Slovenia. Kraški Rob is well-known not only for its rugged relief, where limestone prevails and creates suggestive landscapes, but also as an area with high biodiversity values that is fragile from a hydrological viewpoint due to its many geomorpho-

logical features. Despite attracting a growing number of visitors each year, the potential and suitability of tourist development in Kraški Rob has not yet been subject of a more detailed analysis. As a consequence, we do not have a systematic inventory of the resource endowment of this area, whether it is accessible to visitors, and which features have greater potential to attract visitors. Also, current opportunities, and challenges, for further development of nature-based tourism in Kraški Rob has not been discussed in detail.

First, we will conceptualise nature-based tourism with special attention on nature-society relationships. Drawing on the earlier work of Fredman and colleagues who, over subsequent articles, developed an analytical model for the study of nature-based tourism, we will undertake an assessment of natural attributes for selected sites within the eastern part of Kraški Rob. This will be done by taking into account traditions and trends of the tourism supply and demand in the greater area (Istria).

Contemporary views regarding nature-based tourism

Leisure is seen and written about as a process involving freedom, self-discovery, and growth that people, and particularly those living in highly urbanised areas, often pursue by seeking contact with nature. Some people might search for places of tranquilly to rest and regenerate the body and mind, while others might search for places where they can find adventure and excitement. Current literature conceptualises this type of engagement—activities taking place in nature—as nature-based tourism. Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) note that academic research on the subject of nature-based tourism has its roots in the studies of outdoor recreation from the late 1960s and early 1970s, and has, to date, influenced the theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of nature-based tourism as line of academic inquiry. According to Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010), tourism studies and studies of outdoor recreation have both exerted major influence in terms of methods and approaches used, but also in terms of prevailing topics of inquiry. During the past 15 to 20 years, researchers have developed a systematic knowledge base regarding nature-based tourism, and it is this literature that we turned to and used for the development of this chapter.

It is relevant to note there is no agreement on a precise definition of nature-based tourism and, consequently, frameworks and analytical approaches differ across literature. For instance, Björk (2000) regards na-

ture-based tourism in a broader sense that includes sustainable tourism, ecotourism, and adventure tourism, all of which are strongly dependent on the natural environment. In his review of definitions across selected literature, he notes how ecotourism is described as tourism where cooperation of different actors is at the core, which leads to strong local development. Furthermore, while ecotourism shares similarities with sustainable tourism, in that both deal with preservation of the natural environment, they also differ in a number of others aspects. For instance, the role of international and national policy and the influence policy should have in the development of tourism demand and supply is seen differently. Björk (2000) also differentiates ecotourism from adventure tourism, which is understood to be tourism pursued for the purpose of adventure, exposure to experience and varying degrees of risk, and excitement. In contrast, in a later review of literature, Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) describe nature tourism as tourism pursued in natural areas with a focus on experiences of nature-based products. They identify four recurrent themes: (1) visitors to a nature area; (2) experiences of a natural environment; (3) participation in an activity; and (4) normative components related to sustainable development and local impacts, and so on. Then, as part to a later study, Fredman et al. (2012) suggest a two-dimensional framework elaborated on the experiences of nature-based products. Their framework is made of two dimensions: access to nature and naturalness (Fig. 1). In this chapter, we look closer at this framework and use an adapted version for the development of our analysis.

A two dimensional framework: accessibility and perception of naturalness

Based on a collection of selected literature, Fredman et al. (2012) develop a two-dimensional model intended for the study and further elaboration regarding the role of nature in nature-based tourism. Their model, summarised in Fig. 1, identifies two main dimensions they regard as paramount for tourism vis-à-vis the human-nature relationship: naturalness and accessibility. They suggest this model for all study of nature-based tourism, regardless of whether it is dependent on, enhanced by, or just contextualised in natural environments.

The first dimension they identify is naturalness and suggest that it should be placed on a continuum with *naturalness*, understood as absence of human intervention, on one end and *facilities*, understood as man-made

a) The two-dimensional model b) Adapted version of the model

Fig. 1 A two dimensional model from Fredman et al. (2012) and its adapted version, for the study of nature in nature-based tourism

interventions in nature, on the other. Under naturalness they include natural features that are unique and often taken as the reason for the protection and establishment of protected areas, and wilderness in a broader sense. Under the second dimension *accessibility* they put *open access* on one end and *exclusive rights* (i.e. private property) on the other. Three types of property rights that have implications regarding the accessibility of a natural area appear in their model and these are: personal ownership; public ownership; and common-pool resources.

In Scandinavian countries and the United Kingdom, a landowner's exclusive right to land is limited by the law, in so far as others can enter and walk through land for recreational purposes as long as no crops, vegetation, animals, and natural resources are damaged. In Sweden this is known as the "Right of Public Access", and in the UK as the "Right to Roam". Similar rights can be found also in Norway and Finland. In Slovenia, most land is private property. Some is public property and there are also customary rights to land and natural resources that mostly take the form of village commons.

It is important to note that so-called "pristine nature" or nature that is still "wild" is almost non-existent outside protected areas where special zones and strict nature protection regimes are in place. Protected areas of this type are few, and visitors are not allowed in zones with strict regimes. It is against the law for unauthorised visitors to enter such areas, as it represents an unacceptable transgression on sensitive flora and fauna, and their habitats. It is interesting to note that in their study, Fredman et al. (2012, 293) acknowledge that 'natural environments are more or less impacted or manipulated by humans'. However, the implications of this are not further

elaborated. They affirm that the degree of naturalness increases on the basis of distance from areas of human settlement (remote settlement vs. densely populated) and natural areas closer to urban areas are understood to be less natural compared to those further away. We do not find this to be an accurate representation of natural areas in Europe.

In Europe, inclusive of Slovenia, landscapes have been shaped by humans in one way or another. The idea of naturalness, as an absence of human intervention, has been adjusted to reflect most closely what we understand to be the prevailing reality of anthropogenised landscapes. Therefore, we would suggest a change in the model, namely, changing "naturalness" to "perception of naturalness" in order to allow the exploration of how visitors perceive nature, or "pristine" nature. Consequently, instead of defining remoteness as distance from settlements and wilderness as absence of human intervention, the reinterpreted version we used for our study focuses on the expectations visitors have of nature and its natural attributes. This shifts the focus on individual experiences with nature. Lund (2013) offers a useful critique of the artificial divide between nature and culture that is often used in the tourism industry to promote tourism products and experiences, and to appropriate certain areas for selected activities, leaving out the actual dynamic that occurs physically when a tourist actually interacts with his or her surroundings.

Methods

For this chapter we focus on Kraški Rob, which is an area of great natural interest that has not received much attention in current literature, despite the amount of visitors it attracts. The area is also of an analytical interest because it is understood to be fragile and, as such, land and resources need to be managed in specific ways. In the following sections more information is provided about the research area, and the methods of data collection that we used are introduced.

Data collection occurred in the period from April 1st to 4th, 2019 and was undertaken by a group of seven students enrolled in the 2nd and 3rd years of the undergraduate study programme of Geography at the University of Primorska (Slovenia). The team was coordinated by the second author, who oversaw preparations and coordinated data collection in the field. Preparatory work, conducted in March 2019, included a discussion of the larger geographical area of research interest with a geo-location of selected

settlements (Rakitovec, Zazid, and Podpeč) and their surrounding areas. Data collection was planned as a four-day endeavour in the research area.

The team started with a long walking tour of the selected area, from Lačna above Gračišče to Zazid (Lačna–Kuk–Rakitovec–Lipnik–Zazid) to obtain a first impression. Thereafter, each day the team surveyed one village and its surroundings, making for a total of three villages for the whole period.

During the four days of data-collection, the team undertook observation of the natural environment and also administrated open-ended interviews with locals. Observation focused on the inventory of natural and cultural features, which were documented in written and photographic form. Overall, the team talked to the following local residents:

- two men, both retired (70+ years old) and a local woman (50–55 years old) who is active in organising village events in Rakitovec;
- one entrepreneur in tourism (45–50 years old), a retired women (70+ years old), and a local farmer (30 years old) in Zazid; and
- one livestock farmer (55–60 years old) and one local women employed in the nearby urban area (roughly 40 years old) of Podpeč.

The interviews were open-ended group conversations, focused on local amenities and natural and cultural aspects of interest. During the interviews, local respondents were free to bring up whatever they wanted to talk about, and the research team took notes. No audio recording was undertaken.

Based on observational and interview data, the team undertook an assessment of the current situation and future prospects regarding amenities of touristic interest. For the purpose of this study, accessibility and perception of naturalness were considered regarding the amenities the team shortlisted. The team of surveyors provided a summary of their own impressions and expressed preferences for the amenities that they enjoyed most (Tab. 1).

Description of the study area: the eastern part of Kraški Rob

Kraški Rob is a geomorphological structural stage at the junction of limestone with flysch in the northern part of Slovenian Istria, which gives its name to a wider area 20 km long and 2 to 5 km wide (Fig. 2). Kraški Rob is also the intended name of a prospective protected nature area, the extreme eastern part of which falls within our study area. The area called Kras is a

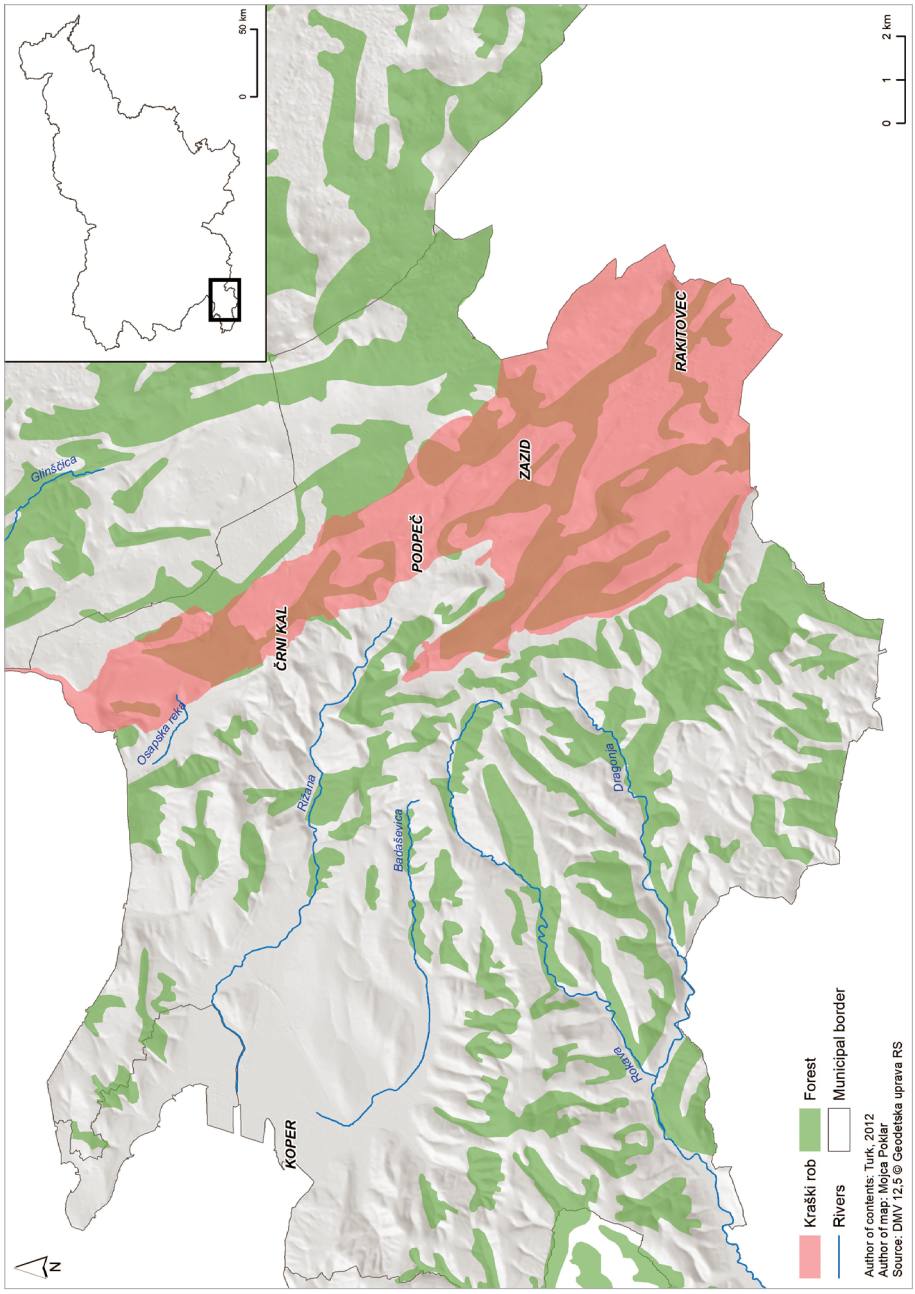

Fig. 2 Geographical location of Kraški Rob

Natura 2000 site and an area of ecological interest. There are several natural features of interest and those found in our study area are: Movraški Kuk; Rakitovski Kras; the grasslands at Golič, Lipnik and Kavčič; and Črni Kal-Hrastovlje Wall (Slovenian Environment Agency, 2019).

Kraški Rob has unique relief, vegetation, and fauna features. It hosts many rare and endangered plant and animal species, which contribute to making Kraški Rob an internationally important bird habitat (See: Turk, 2012). Due to its southern location and warm limestone base, Mediterranean tree and shrub species thrive on the southern slopes of Kraški Rob (e.g. holm oak and laurel). Grasslands found here are an important habitat for orchids and other endemic flora growing along the walls and in the cracks of Kraški Rob (Turk, 2012).

Kraški Rob is a tectonically-based relief formed by the tempering of older limestone on younger flysch rocks. The landscape is very steep, with rocky slopes and walls, and extends from the border with Croatia in the southeast to the border with Italy in the northwest, and continues into both neighbouring countries. Geologists refer to the tectonic unit as the scaly structure of Čičarija and is the result of the subversion of Istria towards the northeast or the movement of Čičarija towards the southwest (Placer, 2007). Due to their low resistance and erosion processes, over time flysch rocks diminished and more resistant limestone rocks spread over 47 cliffs, measuring 51 km in total length. The longest (over 3 km) are found above the settlements Črni Kal, Črnotiče and Podpeč, and the highest are found above Osp (160 m) and Zanigrad (103 m). The limestone stage was transformed by the process of karstification, causing many interesting relief forms to take shape, such as rocky lowlands, tunnels, caves, and sig formations (Natek et al., 1993).

The limestone structural stage, however, is not only a dividing line in the relief, but also in climate, soil, vegetation, and land use. The top part of the structural stage is the karst plateau, which is located in two altitude bands. The first is Rakitovsko-movraški Karst, which, with the exception of its peaks, does not exceed 400 m a.s.l. The second is the eastern continuation of Podgorje Karst onto Čičarija Plateau, with altitudes above 600 m. Both areas of karst are characterised by grassland coverage, and to a lesser extent, rockiness on the surface, as well as sinkholes and dry valleys. In the past, these grasslands served as pastures where locals put up dry stone walls to mark property. It was also common to find dry stone walls around declines where locals would cultivate small gardens on small stretches of

fertile land (Ogrin and Mužina, 2005). Over the past decades, grazing diminished, but today more farmers have livestock so grazing is gradually being reintroduced into Rakitovsko-movraški Karst. The higher grasslands are less grazed on and overgrown, even though they become overgrown more slowly than lower areas. Currently, the dry karst meadows are environments recognised for their exceptional diversity in terms of flowering plants and dolines, and are mostly overgrown with tree and shrub species (Kaligarič, 1997; 2005).

Land use for agricultural production is limited to the valley bottoms and terraced slopes around settlements in the Kraški Rob. It is mainly intended for the production of food for self-sufficiency. The conditions for the growth of cultivated plants vary considerably in the study area, this due to the different altitudes and varying distance from the sea. The surface rises from Podpeč to Rakitovec by 150 m, while Rakitovsko-movraški Karst, which continues westwards in the hinterland, stands between this area and the sea. Rakitovec has a noticeably cooler climate, which does not allow the cultivation of grape vines and plants that need warmth, while in Zazid grapes (and other warmth-dependent crops) thrive in the most favourable sun-facing locations. Podpeč has perhaps the best conditions for agriculture in the area.

Results and discussion

During data collection, numerous natural and cultural amenities were identified and inventoried by the team. Then, with consideration of naturalness and accessibility, as suggested by the model above, a selection of amenities with greater potential was shortlisted.

Rakitovec lies at 530 m, near the border with Croatia in the southeastern part of Kraški Rob. Much of this settlement is located on a steep slope at the foot of Kavčič, above *Rakitovska vala*, and a smaller and younger part in the vicinity of Rakitovec railway station along the Prešnica–Pula route. In the older part of Rakitovec (Fig. 3), houses are close to each other and are located on terraces connected by narrow roads and paths. The part close to the train station is less densely built and most houses have gardens.

Zazid lies at an altitude of 387 m, on the sunny slope of Lipnik (Fig. 4). The older part of Zazid is densely built around a central square with a church and cemetery. The roads and paths in the settlement are very narrow. The newer part of Zazid, however, spreads into the eastern periph-

Fig. 3 Rakitovec village
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

Fig. 4 View from Lipnik
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

ery and is less dense. Several water sources can be found in the vicinity of Zazid.

Finally, Podpeč has an exceptional position as it is located below a rock wall (Fig. 5). It lies at an altitude of 311 m, at the top of a steep slope descending into the upper part of Rižana Valley. Spatially, Podpeč is a very narrow settlement with no space to expand. Houses are placed very close to one another between the rock wall and the road, and the Prešnica–Koper railway line. On the eastern part of the settlement lies a large karst spring that is used for the settlement's drinking water supply.

In terms of the size of local population, there were 116 residents in Rakitovec, 77 residents in Zazid, and 47 residents in Podpeč in 2019 (Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2019). These three settlements have documented population decline since World War II, as most young people leave in search of better living conditions. The result of outmigration is that many houses are empty and decaying. In recent years, the population is stable but aging. There has only been a minimal influx of new residents over the past decade.

Fig. 5 The rock wall and defence tower above the Podpeč
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

It is useful to note that the villages lack services as there are no restaurants, bars, shops, or markets. There are only limited opportunities for overnight accommodation at a few recently renovated houses in Zazid and Podpeč. These facilities can host only a small number of visitors, who have to be prepared to source and cook their own food. There are no restaurants or catering services in the area. Thus, in terms of tourism, the area remains dependent on the nearby larger villages or other urban settlements for supplies, gastronomy, and so on. The nearest larger towns or urban centres are at least 20 minutes distant by car. Despite the lack of services, there is substantial untapped potential within these villages. The team also collected information about locals who farm professionally and/or own livestock, who produce cheese and meat products that are sold on their farms. Several other households grow vegetables for their own needs.

During data collection, interaction with locals from the three villages proved to be very smooth and pleasant. Villagers were welcoming and showed concern for local heritage and nature. Given the scarcity of food supplies (stores) in the area, respondents mentioned that they occasionally help hikers with water, coffee, and friendly conversation.

Also it was reported that, in addition to hikers who use the trials that the Slovene Alpine Association manages, there are visitors who come for biking tours and recreational free-climbing (Fig. 6). Kraški Rob is a well-known attraction among free climbers, who come from across the wider region and Central Europe. However, most choose to stay further west on the Slovenia-Italy border as there are more accommodation, shops, and other services available.

All three settlements are characterised by partially-preserved typical architecture. Stone constructions with special elements such as carved window and door frames, courtyard entrances, porch entrances, annexes, chimneys, etc. (Fig. 7).

Unfortunately, there are many empty and derelict buildings, especially in Rakitovec. Other cultural heritage and popular architecture is also present (Fig. 8, Fig. 9) and there are sites of archaeological interest. In past eras, this area had an important strategic position. Kraški Rob served as a route connecting the sea to Carniola and Čičarija, and various trenches, fortifications, and traces of that period can still be found today. During recent excavations, remains from the Palaeolithic and later periods were discovered in caves and on the slopes near the settlements of the study area.

Fig. 6 Marked mountain trail on Podgorje Karst and Čičarija
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

Fig. 7 An Istrian (vacant) house in Zazid
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

Fig. 8 The Prkič House, Podpeč
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

Fig. 9 Church of St. Helene with burial ground, Podpeč
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

During data collection, the team surveyed and identified thirty amenities of potential touristic interest: eleven in Rakitovec; eight in Podpeč; and eleven in Zazid. Natural amenities included dry meadow, karst caves, karst dolines, and wild flowering plants (Fig. 10).

However, during the last meeting session, the group collectively agreed on the amenities which they short-listed as those with the greatest potential for attracting tourists. These are listed and described in Tab. 1 and ranked accordingly.

Fig. 10 Karst meadows above Rakitovec
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

Tab. 1 Summary of naturalness and accessibility of selected amenities in the eastern part of the Kraški rob

Amenity	Location	Description	Accessibility	Naturalness	Of interest because ...	Fig.
The Karst landscape with the surrounding peaks: Lipnik (804 m); Kavčič (879 m); and Golič (890 m)	On the way to Rakitovec, Zazid	Landscape including high peaks.	Not completely accessible; there are some marked mountain trails, and trails used by hunters and landowners.	Natural with elements of human influence.	Suggestive panoramic view of hills and mountains in the area of Učka, Slavnik, and Slovenian Istria.	Fig. 6
Karst meadows	All of Rakitovsko-movraški Karst and Podgorje Karst	Sub-Mediterranean, dry and semi-dry grassland.	Potentially accessible; most are private property so access must be arranged with owners.	Natural with elements of human influence.	A large variety of flowering plants, most notable in spring (daffodils, whistles, peonies, irises, golden root), grasses, and dandelions.	Fig. 10
Kal na lokvi	Rakitovec	This is a large pond that used to be an important source of water. The water sources of nearby villages were smaller, making this one stand out.	Accessible; it is located in a public area.	Man-made.	The big pond at the entrance of the village is the symbol of the village itself, and a reminder of the past when many inhabitants kept livestock.	Fig. 11
Rakitovec village	Rakitovec	Traditional settlement with rural architecture that has remained largely unchanged.	Accessible; on the paved road from Zazid and Movraž that runs to border with Croatia.	Man-made.	There are many man-made items such as balconies (porches), entrances, chimneys, wells, religious monuments and shrines, and building inscriptions of interest.	Fig. 3

Tab. 1 Summary of naturalness and accessibility of selected amenities in the eastern part of the Kraški rob (continued)

Amenity	Location	Description	Accessibility	Naturalness	Of interest because …	Fig.
The Istrian House	Zazid	Traditional Istrian house with well-preserved architectural elements.	Potentially accessible; located on private property but can be seen from the outside while walking on the (public) municipal road.	Man-made.	A building that is of interest in terms of the history of the area and life in the past generally. It is the oldest house in the village, a former school, and an interesting example of local architecture.	Fig. 7
The Prešnica–Pula railway line	Zazid	The railroad tracks used to be an important element in local life as they connected the area with other parts of the country. Today this connection is less important.	Accessible; by (public) municipal road.	Man-made.	A train route and means of transportation for tourists, hikers, and cyclists.	Fig. 12
Landscape—path and view from Lipnik	Zazid	The path to Lipnik leads past two water sources, the flysch and limestone rock base, and through a forest to a karst plateau with dry meadows.	Accessible; by (public) marked mountain trail.	Natural with elements of human influence.	There is an overgrown water source that once supplied locals with drinking water. The second spring lies below the railway line. Along the path, an alternation of flysch and limestone can be observed. From the top of Lipnik one can see distant Koper, Trieste, and the Šavrini Hills.	Fig. 4

Tab. 1 Summary of naturalness and accessibility of selected amenities in the eastern part of the Kraški rob (continued)

Amenity	Location	Description	Accessibility	Naturalness	Of interest because ...	Fig.
The Prkič House	Podpeč	The Prkič House was a stonecutting workshop of masters Andrey and Benko from Sočerga, built in 1547.	Accessible; located in a public (cultural heritage) area with a public path leading to it.	Man-made.	This house is used by villagers for meetings, and it is suitable for presenting local history.	Fig. 8
Defence tower with a view	Podpeč	The defence tower is part of village history. It is in a remarkable location high on a steep slope, allowing an unobstructed view of the wider area.	Accessible; located in a public area with a public path leading to it.	Man-made.	Built in the 11th century, it is 17 m high and has 1.5 m thick walls. It was built by the Istrian Count Ulrich Weimarski. Below it there is a natural karst cave that served as a hiding place for the locals in times of unrest.	Fig. 5
Church with burial ground	Podpeč	Church of St. Helene was built in 1489 and is known for its frescoes and stone carvings.	Accessible; located in a public area with a public path leading to it.	Man-made.	An interesting amenity from a cultural and art-history point of view.	Fig. 9

It is significant that most of the amenities selected are either semi-natural karst landscapes, or other nature features with man-made aspects (Fig. 11, Fig. 12). If we look back at the model of Fredman and Tyrväinen (2010) we can see that none of the selected sites are located on the extreme side of the naturalness category (See: Fig. 1). This is interesting for several reasons. Namely, during the first day the team was most interested in and visited the most relevant peaks and karst landscapes, however, as field work progressed and the team began to interact with locals, their perception changed—in terms of nature and of which of its aspects were most interesting. Interactions with villagers allowed for a new context to emerge and helped the team learn about human-nature interactions in the area, and related challenges regarding water scarcity—a problem faced by many karst areas.

Fig. 11 Kal na lokvi, Rakitovec
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

Fig. 12 The Prešnica–Pula railway line
Photo by Valentina Brečko Grubar, 2019

Conclusion

In this chapter we chose to focus on nature-based tourism and explore ideas and tools developed in this field of academic inquiry. We found that literature from Scandinavian countries most attracted our interest. We choose to borrow an adapted version of the model of naturalness and accessibility proposed by Fredman et al. (2012) and draw on Lund's (2013) ideas regarding experiencing nature, in order to perform an analysis of the study area—the eastern part of Kraški Rob—with the aim of surveying its current potential in terms of nature-based tourism.

We noted that Kraški Rob is strongly characterised by natural features of attractive appearance and majestic karst slopes where traces of human intervention are constant throughout. Field work revealed that in the eastern part of Kraški Rob, different combinations of naturalness and accessibility could be found, and a state of semi-naturalness and privately-owned land (that may or may not be accessible) prevailed.

In her study, Lund (2013) pointed out that the experience people have when in nature is not completely universal, given that people define nature 'in relation to how they experience it, engaging with it'. She goes on to say that there are different degrees of nature, and people appreciate nature in various ways, which is influenced by how they interact with it. The research team had a perspective-expanding experience, and found that their pre-conceived notions about Kraški Rob changed appreciably after their interactions with the area and its residents. Almost all of the amenities they eventually shortlisted have been, in one way or other, shaped by local inhabitants.

To conclude this chapter we would like to outline a few recommendations for literature and for practice and policy. First, regarding the two-dimensional model used, future research could explore the way in which naturalness, as found in karst landscapes (stones and scarce vegetation) is perceived by visitors and how this, coupled with accessibility, impacts their experience with nature. Further understanding of this might reveal which aspects are most likely to make people want to return. Second, regarding policy, local decision-makers should take into account that this area could be of interest to those who like to spend time outdoors and enjoy nature, but its potential is limited by the lack of certain services. The success of nature-based tourism lies in attractive natural assets with the addition of competitive tourism supply (e.g. accommodation) to cater to visitors across different segments. This area already attracts hikers, bikers, and free-climbers, but because it lacks core services, most visitors find accommodation and food elsewhere, which is a missed opportunity for the local economy. Third, tourism is about leisure time and it should boost positive sentiment for visitors to want to return (and to tell others how nice it is, so they too might want to come). It is not very clear how the derelict houses and the damaged parts of these villages might impact the experience of visitors. Certainty, questions might be raised regarding safety and general aesthetics of the village itself. Thus, there is a need for broad strategies to deliver not only services, but also opportunities for the local community to mend and restore damaged houses.

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