

# National mechanism for spurring innovation in Slovenian tourism

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## Abstract

Innovation has been part of tourism since its beginnings but only recently has it attracted the attention of researchers and policy makers. In Slovenia a national mechanism has been developed to spur innovation in Slovenian tourism. The story began in 2004 with the Sejalec Award (Slovene for “sower”), an award for creative and innovative tourism achievements that contribute to the recognition of Slovenian tourism, continued with Bank of Tourism Potentials in Slovenia (BTPS) in 2006, Snovalec (Slovene for “creator”), financial support for inventive tourism ideas in 2009, and Innovative Slovenian Travel and BTPS Challenges in 2010. Numerous awards, including those of UNWTO and the European Commission prove that mechanisms for development and promotion of innovation in Slovenian tourism are heading in the right direction.

Key words: tourism innovation, innovation systems, tourism policy

## 1 Bank of tourism potentials in Slovenia

Bank of Tourism Potentials in Slovenia (BTPS) was established in 2006 as a joint project of the Slovenian Tourist Board, the Directorate for Tourism at the Ministry of Economy and the University of Primorska, the Faculty of Tourism Studies Turistica. Its initiator, Dejan Križaj, suggested developing a national mechanism to spur innovation and increase the innovative potential of tourism in Slovenia.

Fig. 1: [www.btps.com](http://www.btps.com)



The main goal of BTPS is to connect various actors who can contribute to a faster and more efficient exploitation of R&D opportunities in Slovenian tourism on all levels. Networking occurs at [www.btps.si](http://www.btps.si). All registered users can submit their ideas for new tourism products, services, prototypes ... as “idea deposits”, and their financial, material and/or labour resources as “energy deposits” on-line and free of charge. All deposits are revised by Bank Council.

In the first four years of the Bank’s operation, 240 ideas, 39 energies, 273 news and 82 knowledge deposits were submitted – 50 of the idea and energy deposits were already realized. Over 66.000 visits and over 260.000 page views were recorded. Approximately 750 users were registered in recent months and over 700 friendship requests were accepted on Facebook.

The quality of the project was recognised by various national and international institutions, including UNWTO (the Ulysses Award for Innovative Tourism

Achievements, 2009), the European Commission (best practice in the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, 2009) and the Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Entrepreneurship and Foreign Investments (best practice at the 2010 5th Slovenian Innovation Forum).

## 2 The Sejalec

Two years earlier, in 2004, the Slovenian Tourist Board organized the Sejalec competition for the first time, seeking the most innovative and creative tourism achievements in Slovenia. The Sejalec rewards successful tourism innovations or well planned and successfully executed new products and improvements that contain the elements of the applicant’s originality, systematic business thinking and high quality promotion of Slovene tourism. The main aim of the Sejalec is to spur creativity and innovation on an entrepreneurial level, in destinations, tourism associations and in the marketing of tourism products.

The Sejalec competition runs annually. The selection procedure takes place in several phases. Pre-applications are first completed and the best applicants (as selected by the jury) are invited to send in more detailed presentations later on. Among these, semi-finalists are selected. Field trips are organized for the jury in order to personally meet the semi-finalists and to experience their tourism services. The following criteria are taken into account when selecting the winners: innovation development; innovation marketing and monitoring; innovation results. Winners of the Sejalec competition are announced in November/December at the annual Slovenian tourism conference.

The first Gold Sejalec award was won by the Celica Hostel Ljubljana in 2004, followed by Terme Čatež Thermal Riviera and Cycling around Panonske Terme (2005), Kekčeva Domačija Farmhouse and Sloveniabike.com (2006), Passenger Terminal Koper (2007), Igloo Village Krvavec (2008), Centre of Culinary Arts - Taste Slovenia (2009) and Bohinj Park ECO Hotel in 2010.

Fig. 2: 2010 Gold Sejalec- Bohinj Park ECO Hotel



### 3 The Snovalec

While the Sejalec rewards existing and realized tourism innovations and while BTPS encourages idea e-flow, energy deposit the Snovalec (first introduced in 2009) supports realization of promising tourism ideas. The Snovalec spurs creativity, inventiveness and innovation in tourism by promoting and bringing tourism inventions to life that will eventually grow into tourism innovations. The Snovalec is a BTPS energy deposit with € 40.000 fund contributed by the Directorate for Tourism at the Ministry of Economy in cooperation with the Slovenian Tourist Board.

The Snovalec selection procedure is similar to that of the Sejalec. The Bank Council selects the most promising idea deposits submitted to the Bank by its users in the course of one year. The best applicants are invited to fill in a more detailed form. Based on these, finalists are selected. Finalists meet the jury in person and are asked to present their ideas in 20 minutes. The following criteria is taken into account when selecting the winners: invention potential, plan of realization and expected results.

The first Snovalec competition winners, announced in December 2009, were asked to bring their ideas to life by November 2010. We are happy to say that two ideas were realized in the first call - photographer tours [Adriatic2alps.com](http://Adriatic2alps.com) and a floating water apartment. In 2010, four new ideas were financially supported and by November 2011, we expect the following tourism products to be developed in Slovenia: The Academy for Young Tourism Journalists, Istrian Houses, Innovative Pension Renovation, and Glamping ECO Village.

### 4 BTPS Challenges

In 2010, a new service called BTPS Challenges was added to the existing BTPS initiatives for innovative tourism. BTPS Challenges is a web-based crowdsourcing competition where real-life problems of Slovenian tourism facilities are solved by an undefined group of people through an open call.

The first challenge was set by the Slovenian Tourist Board and it was organized in cooperation with the Challenge: Future initiative. C:F is an open world-wide youth competition that showcases creative youth, their high potential and ability to foresee the future. The aim of the challenge titled “Give me three days of GREEN sLOVEnia” was to design a trip within Slovenia with the principles of responsible travel and eco-tourism in mind. The proposed trip had to last three days and should not cost more than 500 Euros. The winner, Canadian Adam McRae, won a trip around Slovenia for two, according to his winning proposal “Natural Phenomenon”. His impressions from the extended trip can be read at <http://btps-travel-logs.blogspot.com/>.

The premiere challenge was followed by a set of challenges focusing on “Innovative Marketing for Green Tourism”. Seven real-life marketing problems of Slovenian tourism businesses were published in summer 2010 and 25 solutions from three countries were submitted. The winning solutions were presented at a workshop at the 17th Golden Drum International Advertising Festival in Portorož, Slovenia. The event co-organized by the University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies and Faculty of Management was attended by over 100 participants.

## 5 Innovative Slovenian travel

Individual tourism products which are new and different can in themselves be a great inspiration as to where to go travelling in Slovenia. In order to make things easier for those looking for the full story about a different kind of Slovenian tourism, as part of the activities in the Bank of Tourism Potentials in Slovenia project, we have invited the participation of winners from the past public Sejalec and Snovalec competitions. We have asked them to make up from the mass of award-winning innovative products the first series of tourist packages offering a composite experience of innovative Slovenian tourism. These packages last from one to seven days, and cost from just under EUR 40 to over EUR 400, and cover several Slovenian regions. We are certain that through them you will sense the winds of change bringing a new freshness and new

ideas about the direction in which Slovenian tourism can still develop.

## 6 Good practices

In order to see the reflection of theory in practice, last year’s winners of the Sejalec competition are presented on the following pages. Due to the high quality of applications, four Sejalec winners were announced; one Gold, one Silver and two Bronze. Have a look at how these innovative Slovenian tourism products came to life.

### 6.1 2010 Gold Sejalec - Bohinj Park ECO Hotel

Slovenia has a long lasting tradition as far as environmental protection is concerned. One of the most obvious study cases for this is Bohinj Glacial Valley located in Triglav National Park. Such delicate surroundings put pressure on tourism development in general; soon the only possible form related to this particular area will be sustainable tourism or even merely its most distinguished form – ecological tourism.

Bohinj Park ECO Hotel ([www.bohinj-park-hotel.si](http://www.bohinj-park-hotel.si)) was built with highest awareness of the environment and is as such currently one of the most advanced and energy efficient hotels in central Europe. In May 2010 it officially became the first ecological resort in Slovenia to be given the prestigious Green Globe certificate. From its very beginning in June 2009, Bohinj Park ECO Hotel has been devoted to environmental issues. The Green Globe recognition, which is the result of a highly regarded and selective certification process, is an epic benchmark in the Hotel’s steadfast effort to build itself as a responsible tourism destination. This achievement signified the Hotel’s environmental orientation and proved to the public as well as to guests and personnel, the seriousness of sustainable initiatives and the need for their further development.

The ecological hotel continually puts new ideas into practice. In the beginning of February 2010, it became the first Slovenian hotel with an electric filling station for hybrid and electric cars. The filling station is located in the hotel garage area. Guests who drive electric cars

are free to use it without charge. This is another attempt of boosting green, sustainable tourism values in the Bohinj region. The hotel also encourages guests to use public transport by offering extra discounts for guests travelling by train or bus, rental bicycle, etc.

At the 2010 Golden Drum Marketing Festival a workshop on innovative marketing for green tourism was given which introduced collected and specifically noted ideas prepared by potential tourists on the basis of challenges brought to the public by tourist suppliers, agencies or individual entrepreneurs. The Bohinj Park ECO Hotel published five innovative challenges. Hotel Director Anže Čokl took this opportunity to announce his stand on the project: “Businesses and economy sectors whole-heartedly endorse youth potential in Slovenia, knowing that applied knowledge presents an individual’s added value. Such challenges and practical assignments promote the personal and professional growth of our students.”

In February 2011, hotel management received the Conventa Academy Innovation Award on account of its initiatives in the area of congress tourism. It is the only establishment which offers the possibility of sustainable events organisation in broad south-eastern Europe. Wholesome, socially responsible, eco-friendly alternatives for business meetings is becoming not merely a trend but a mainstream feature which signifies the importance of Mr. Čokl’s “green vision”, aiming to conserve the fragile nature of our planet on an international level.

The Bohinj Park ECO Hotel therefore not only represents one of Europe’s most advanced ecological properties but it also aims to set general foundations of sustainable development in Slovene tourism. The 2010 Gold Sealec Award, an annual recognition from the Slovenian Tourist Board is therefore well placed in this unique long-term, grand and promising investment.

## 6.2 2010 Silver Sealec - Vineyard Retreats

Slovenia has been enriched with a new, unique and attractive tourist product called “Turizem v zidanicah” (Vineyard Cottage Tourism, <http://www.zidanice.si/>), which is meant for tourists who are looking for authentic

Fig. 3: 2010 Silver Sealec - Vineyard Retreats



and genuine tourist arrangements, for some peace and quiet and a chance to relax in the countryside. Vineyard Cottage Tourism was developed for visitors seeking an active vacation experience, including hiking, cycling, horseback riding and boating, admirers of natural and cultural heritage, visitors who enjoy culinary and gastronomic diversity, and people who enjoy going to traditional ethnological and other types of events.

Vineyard cottages are a unique feature in the wine-growing region of Posavje which includes the wine-growing districts of Dolenjska, Bela Krajina and Bizeljsko-Sremič. Nowhere else in the world can you find this many vineyard cottages, wooden wine storage rooms and wine cellars grouped together in such a small area. All these structures stand on the edges of vineyards in splendid locations which offer lovely views. The agricultural part of the vineyard cottage is represented by the authentic wine cellar; the living quarters on the ground floor consist of a kitchen, toilet, bathroom and sleeping quarters. The vineyard cottages are fully fitted with modern equipment and provide visitors with everything they need for a pleasant vacation.

The road to realization of this project was a long one. It took many steps and a lot of enthusiasm. The road was paved by the Kompas Travel Agency Novo Mesto ([www.kompas-nm.si](http://www.kompas-nm.si)) which currently markets the product. Most importantly of all, legislation needed to be changed since previous legislation did not allow tourism activities to take place in vineyard cottages. A list of providers was then compiled and workshops were organized in order to ensure the necessary standards,

arrange the necessary documentation and operation licences, and Tourism in Vineyard Cottages Consortium was set up. Facilities needed to be categorized and the model of a scattered hotel was set up. It was necessary to link up with other tourism services in the region. Last but not least, promotional and marketing activities were developed, including visual image, manual, catalogues, and the website.

The product was given the Seialec award since it represents a unique accommodation service on a global scale. The project contributes to the preservation of the cultural landscape (preventing the neglect of vineyards). The project initiators came up with new accommodation facilities without the need for major investment. They were the first in Slovenia to develop the model of the scattered hotel and were able to link up the tourism services of the entire region. They try to follow the guidelines for green, eco-friendly tourism, promoted by the Slovenian Tourist Board and are managing to transform idle capital into a profitable business.

### 6.3 2010 Bronze Seialec - A Taste of Heritage

The Rogatec Culture, Tourism and Development Institute manages the Rogatec Open-air Museum (<http://www.muzej-rogatec.si/>), a state-owned cultural monument and a monument of national importance which was nominated for the European Museum of the Year in 1997. In 2006, the Institute took over the management of other important cultural monument in the city, the Renaissance Baroque Strmol Mansion which is owned by the Municipality of Rogatec.

Maintaining the restored heritage is not nearly enough to preserve it; for its long-term survival - both in a spiritual and economic sense - the heritage urgently needs interpretative displays and satisfied visitors. Most visitors have no previous knowledge about the site and without some interpretive direction, they are not able to “read the heritage” or stories told by individual architectural elements and exhibits. If visitors are offered the chance to experience what has been forgotten or to gain new insights about themselves, about the society and the environment

Fig. 4: 2010 Bronze Seialec - A Taste of Heritage



in which they live, in their sub consciousness, their attitude towards heritage/history will become more positive. They will only return to the museum if this becomes their need. And today's modern man needs inter/action and a(ttra)ction!

Rogatec's long-term vision is to develop cultural and “green” tourism with a view to preserve heritage and ensure sustainable development of the entire region. The stories of heritage - handicrafts, customs and habits - are the main thread and the basic “material” that is used to fill four separate program formats: an ethnographic demonstration, an educational workshop, an experiential workshop and productive activity/sale in the museum shop.

This methodical organizational model can be filled with a random number of additional or new stories of heritage that have been connected into a comprehensive cultural tourism program named “A Taste of Heritage”. The interpretation of heritage takes place with minimal verbal interpretation: the visitor himself uncovers the story using all his senses, experiencing his own

experience of history in accordance with his own desires, needs and the expectations of a modern person.

The so-devised cultural tourism program is expected to have a number of benefits, yet it also triggers some additional synergetic effects. The basic methodical organizational model provides a flexible range of attractive cultural tourism programs adapted to the needs of visitors. The quality of the programs is assured by trained mentors/demonstrators/guides who lead the programs. As the only open-air museum in Slovenia with such a permanent offer of adventure programs for visitors, the media finds them very appealing. The advantages and innovation of the “A Taste of Heritage” program was noted by the Slovenian Tourist Board which awarded the program the 2010 Bronze Sejalac award.

#### 6.4 2010 Bronze Sejalac - Roman Games

Two thousand years ago the Romans knew how to treat the body and spirit. Already then, people were aware of the beneficial effects of Roman baths. It is precisely this sybaritic spirit of ancient Rome transferred into modern times and adapted to modern man that accompanies and pleases visitors of Terme Ptuj ([www.terme-ptuj.si](http://www.terme-ptuj.si)). The youngest Slovene thermal spa centre was in fact built on the site where the destiny of Roman emperor was decided in 69 AD. Nowadays, to be successful in the extremely competitive tourism market, it is of crucial importance to produce original and attractive products not only to convince guests but to make them enthusiastic about them.

Innovation is one of five key values which guided Terme Ptuj where a new success story in tourism has started with the Grand Hotel Primus. A unique tourism product in Slovenia was designed in an innovative way based on the rich history of the oldest town in Slovenia. The story of ancient Rome and the Romans is present in every segment of the tourist offer proposed by Terme Ptuj, and Roman games are just one important element which effectively sustains the “Roman story”.

With the objective of deeply involving Roman cultural heritage in the tourist offer, Terme Ptuj established links with numerous associations and organised groups from Ptuj and surroundings. The project of

Fig. 5: 2010 Bronze Sejalac - Roman Games



the revitalisation of Roman heritage thus connected the various elements and agents and at the same time offered a wonderful opportunity to the region (which is mostly known for its winter carnival) to promote itself in other seasons as well. The main objective of the project “Innovative Revitalisation of Roman Heritage” is networking of the company Terme Ptuj as one of the most prominent providers of tourist services in the entire area with associations engaged in the preservation of cultural heritage.

The project called “Roman Games in Terme Ptuj” has been on-going since 2008 and has been an important element in the so-called Roman story. Every August, Ptuj symbolically again becomes the ancient Roman town Poetovium which used to be an important military and commercial centre. A procession, winding along the streets of the old town core, groups more than one thousand participants dressed up as the Romans of different social levels – senators, soldiers, gladiators, ordinary citizens, priestesses and Vestals, slaves, Celtic soldiers... The varied programme of Roman games in 2010 was the work of more than 35 organised groups from Ptuj and its surroundings. Thus the basis has been set for regional cooperation, communication and partnerships among numerous providers of tourist services, tourism, cultural and other organisations and clubs. Last year several ethnographic societies from other Slovene regions and from other countries (Austria, Croatia and Serbia) joined the project. The games were attended by approximately 30,000 visitors. This well-established tourist product was awarded a 2010 Bronze Sejalac for its innovativeness.

# Nacionalni mehanizmi za spodbujanje inovacij v slovenskem turizmu

## Povzetek

Inovativnost je s turizmom povezana že od njegovega pojava, vendar je šele v zadnjem času pritegnila pozornost raziskovalcev in turistične politike. V Sloveniji je bil z namenom spodbujanja inovativnosti slovenskega turizma uveden ustrezní nacionalni mehanizem. Zgodba se je pričela leta 2004 z razpisom Sejalac, ki nagraduje ustvarjalne in inovativne dosežke, v letu 2006 nadaljevala z Banko turističnih priložnosti Slovenije (BTPS), nato s Snovalcem, finančno spodbudo za inventivne turistične ideje, v letu 2009 in Inovativnimi slovenskimi potepanji ter BTPS izzivi v letu 2010. Številne nagrade, vključno z nagradama UNWTO in Evropske komisije, dokazujejo, da mehanizem za spodbujanje in promocijo inovativnosti v slovenskem turizmu napreduje v pravi smeri.

Ključne besede: turistična inovativnost, inovacijski sistemi, turistična politika