DIVIDED HISTORY FOR A COMMON FUTURE: THE “PAST” AS A POTENTIAL FOR REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract. Kočevsko in southern Slovenia is a predominantly karstic region, covered by expanses of intact woodland, rich in a natural variety of flora and fauna. A part of it is still virgin woodland. Approximately 600 years ago, the region was colonised by German settlers, mostly as a kind of punishment. They cultivated the land and were largely resistant to ethnic integration, remaining a ‘German enclave’ within Slovenian space and society for hundreds of years until 1941, when Slovenia was occupied by fascist and Nazi troops. According to the agreement between Hitler and Mussolini the “Gotschee-Germans” were moved to southern Styria (north of the river Sava). Their settlements were destroyed by Italian troops to avoid them being used by the Slovenian resistance. The Slovenian anti-fascist partisans instead developed their political and military headquarters, technical workshops and hospitals deep within the Kočevsko woods. After the war thousands of Slovenian “domobranci” (the Homeguard) and Croatian “ustaše” crossed the border into Austria but were turned back from Austrian Carinthia by Anglo-American troops and returned to Yugoslavia, where they met a terrible fate at the hands of the partisans. During socialism, the Kočevsko region has returned to woodland again, as it had been 600 years ago. The natural environment, two tragic destinies and one period of heroic resistance represent a rich base for establishing cultural/historical paths, open-air museums, memorial sites and similar approaches to protecting, reconstructing and promoting natural, historical and cultural heritage. The paper discusses some possibilities and makes some suggestions for transforming these different destinies from a traumatic past to a future perspective.

Rezumat. Istorie divizată pentru un viitor comun. “Trecutul” - ca posibilă resursă a dezvoltării regionale. Kočevsko în sudul Sloveniei este o regiune carstică, acoperită cu păduri intacte în mare parte şi extinse cu floră şi faună bogate şi variate. Cu cca 600 de ani în urmă, regiunea a fost colonizată cu germani, marea majoritate fiind pedeapsiţi să locuiască aici. Aceştia au cultivat terenul şi au rezistat integrării entice, constituiindu-se într-o enclavă germană în interiorul spaţiului şi societăţii slovene. Conform înţelegerii dintre Hitler şi Mussolini aceştii “Gotschee-Germans” au fost mutaţi în sudul Styriei (la nord de Sava). Locuinţele lor au fost distruse de trupele italiene, pentru a împiedica folosirea lor de către rezistenţa slovenă. Astfel, partizanii sloveni antifascişti şi-au dezvoltat centrele de comandă politice şi militare, întâlnirele tehnice şi spitalele în inima pădurilor Kočevsko. După război, mii de sloveni “domobranci” (gârzile civile) şi “ustaše” (ostaşi ) croaţi au traversat graniţa în Austria, dar au fost reţinuţi în Carinthia austriacă de trupele anglo-amecare şi returnaţi Yugoslaviei, unde au cunoscut o teribilă răzbunare din partea partizanilor. În timpul socialismului, regiunea Kočevsko s-a transformat din nou într-un ţinut împădurit, cum a fost cu 600 de ani în urmă. Mediul natural, cele două destine tragice şi o perioadă de rezistenţă eroică reprezintă un trecut bogat pentru stabilirea unui circuit cultural-istoric, a unui muzeu în aer liber, a unor situri memoriabile sau altor realizări similare, în scopul de a proteja, reconstrui şi promova moştenirea naturală, istorică şi culturală. Articolul ia în discuţie câteva posibilităţi şi face câteva sugestii pentru transformarea acestor destine diferite dintr-un trecut traumatizant într-un punct de plecare viitor.

Keywords: Slovenia, regional development, periphery, historical heritage, minorities
1. INTRODUCTION: HOW TO CHANGE A TRAUMATIC PAST INTO PERSPECTIVES FOR DEVELOPMENT?

The region of Kočevsko is located between the Krka and Kolpa Rivers in the southern-most part of Slovenia. It is a karstic area and is one of the most forested Slovenian regions. This region, together with neighbouring Gorjanci and Snežnik in Slovenia and Gorski Kotar in Croatia, is the largest and one of the most well-preserved wooded areas in Central Europe. The hundred-year old virgin woodland of spruces, beech and fir-trees form a natural scenic backdrop to the area, full of history and its memories. Kočevsko is a region where three different historical destinies cross paths: those of the “Gotscheers”, settlers originally from Germany who settled in the region in the 13th century and were removed during the Second World War; of the partisan anti-fascist movement during the Second World War (one of its headquarters was in this area); and of the so-called “Domobranci”, the anti-communist soldiers who, after the Second World War, were massacred and buried by the communist-led partisans. The history of two human tragedies and a period of heroic resistance are now covered by woodland, its original natural state as was the case more than 600 years ago. This rather mysterious land is one of the least developed and populated Slovenian peripheral areas. Development opportunities for the future of the region should connect with its colourful history.

In the last two decades there have been many examples of attempts to incorporate local history as a local/regional resource for the purpose of tourism development. The wine-roads, memorial parks, cultural trails and paths, points of interest and other similar forms have changed the nature of cultural and historical heritage: all these present a challenge and offer potential for development.

In order to realise this challenge it is necessary to make two important steps:
1. to identify or declare selected points, objects, stories etc. as heritage in a particular region, and
2. to find appropriate ways to implement these goals.

It sounds easier in theory than it is in practice to realise heritage goals. It is said that “history is written by the winners”. As such, the ‘truth’ is not just a chronology of facts, but also an interpretation of the past. This is particularly evident when we depict ‘our’ version of the events in the past, and their consequences. Such a ‘popular’ interpretation of ‘history’ is not the same as an academic treatment of history and its evaluation. Mostly it is a mixture of ‘academic history’ and local legends, myths and simplified interpretations. Most of these stories emphasise only one aspect or side of the story. Memorials can be a strong instrument of propaganda and whole areas of Central and Eastern Europe were (and still are) covered by many typical ‘socialist’ sculptures. They were all created as a demonstrative expression of the regime’s power, and have since acquired a new meaning as a result of the downfall of socialism. However, many such memorials with the same ambition can be seen all over the world, mostly older but some also more recent. In most cases their goal is not about representing historic truth, but exactly the opposite: they try and make ‘our’ interpretation of the heritage become the general interpretation as understood by the masses; they try and declare an interpretation of ‘history’. Such interpretations of
“heritage” are very limited in time and value. It does not represent the larger picture, may not be of interest for the larger audience and can create false impressions at an international level. For this reason, it is important to base the communication of historic heritage and similar forms of public interpretation of the past on serious, scholarly analysis. Only when the whole complexity of a region and its people(s) is reflected, can it become a real attraction and, as a result, offer potential for development.

The aforementioned weaknesses and pitfalls are also the reason for the lack of local representatives who can put such ideas into reality. The management of cultural and historical heritage needs people with different forms of “know-how” and good coordination if it is to be successful.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate some opportunities for the making of a historical memorial park for Kočevsko, a region where two tragic destinies and one rather heroic period of resistance have taken place. A central problem is that until now these three stories could not be reconciled with one another. The stories concern the tragic destiny of Gotscheers’ Germans (Kočevski Nemci), the tragedy of the mass killings of the ‘Domobranci’ in Kočevski Rog and the role the region played in the Slovenian partisan movement. These different destinies and three separate memories all took place within in one relatively short period of history in one geographic region.

Is it possible to bring these together in one single ‘heritage’ and to market these as a local-regional ‘speciality’?

2. THE GEOGRAPHIC CHARACTER OF KOČEVSKO

Kočevsko is a region in southern Slovenia which encompasses nearly 1,000 square kilometres. The regions naturally bounded by two rivers, the Krka with Črmošnjica to the east and Kolpa to the south. Both rivers have cut small canyons into the karstic geology of the region. To the north, a high karstic plateau borders with Suha krajina, also a typical karstic area. To the west the typical high karstic area continues into the Snežnik mountain area. In the centre of the region, lie the Kočevsko polje, the typical karstic lowlands in characteristically ‘dinaric’ orientation: from north-west to south-east. This is surrounded by ‘polje’, higher karstic plateaus such as Kočevski Rog to the east and Stojna, Goteniška gora and Kočevska gora with the smaller Gotenica valley to the west. With the exception of the river Rinža and some small springs no other water flows in the region. The land exhibits many typical geological characteristics of karstic regions, such as dolines and caves. More than 70% of the region is covered by forest; the dominant wood is beech and fir (abietis-fagetum dinaricum)\(^1\), typical for the Dinaric region which extends to the southeast. Thanks to Count Auersperg, the owners of the forests and also to the sensitive foresting undertaken up until the Second World War, the biological vitality and diversity of these forests and the area have been preserved to the present day. After the Second World War, the area was declared a protected area to preserve the forest and as a result the Kočevsko became a symbol of woodland and houses one of the most important populations of bears, wolves and lynxes in Central Europe. In some spots in the Kočevski Rog one can still find primeval forests.\(^2\)

The traffic connections to and through the region are relatively scarce.

\(^1\) Marinček (1987): 88.
3. THE HISTORIC HERITAGE OF KOČEVSKO: THREE DIFFERENT STORIES

3.1. The Gotscheers (Kočevarji): a german-speaking community

More than 600 years ago, the area was almost exclusively covered by woodland. The karstic stony surface with few water sources and barely arable soil was not attractive for stable settlements. Only around the edge of Kočevsko polje were there some smaller settlements. Then, the estates of Ortenburg, who owned most of the land in Kočevsko colonised the region together with the peasants who had rebelled in their homelands in Tyrol and western Carinthia and later also from Franken, Schwabisch Jura and Turingia. They settled in two main waves, in the 1330s and in the 1350s-1360s. The colonisation was a sort of punishment for the peasants, as they were forced to try and cultivate the empty karstic land that was covered mostly by woodland. They nevertheless built houses, created local communities in typical ‘Gotscheer’ architectural style, cleared small springs and built “zysternas” to improve their water supplies. Step by step and over many generations the settlers cultivated the land until it became a cultural landscape changed by man. The main phase of colonisation was finished by the beginning of the 15th century, but some settlements were founded later in the 19th century as a result of internal colonisation among the Gotscheers. Because they were fairly isolated, they retained their linguistic characteristics. They spoke a dialect of German that even those who spoke German found hard to understand. It was a particularly rare cultural heritage. Gotscheer-Germans remained as a kind of ‘ethnic enclave’ within the contemporary Slovenian territory until 1942, when the community was resettled as a result of an agreement between Mussolini and Hitler on the resettlement of ethnic Germans who remained in Italy after the borders between Italy and Nazi Germany were drawn.

Because of the poor economic conditions, the German emperor Frederic the third granted the Gotscheers some special privileges. For example, they were allowed to sell their wooden products throughout the empire. In addition to farming they received an important part of their income from working in the woods especially in the 19th century, as well as through the mining of coal and crystals. After the coal-mine in Kočevje was opened in the 1830s, the town became an important local centre, particularly when two professional schools were founded. But industrialisation did not bring enough employment and many began to emigrate from the Kočevsko area, as was the case in many other disadvantaged areas in the Slovenian ethnic territories. Since 1880 the number of Gotscheers began to

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4 Zgodovina Slovencev (1980): 345; supposed on base of dialectological researches.
6 The tank, made from wood or (mostly) by stones, where the people in karst areas collect rain- or snow-water. They normally extend from 8-30 m³, what was enough for traditional water supply. Some of them were “collectives” and much bigger. Some of them really represent important cultural heritage.
7 Tschinkel Walter (1973) made a vocabulary of »gotscheer dialect – german« on the base of some older version. The »Gotscheer Mundart« differs significantly from all other german dialects.
8 Enciklopedija Slovenije, 5th book (Kolonizacija); the right sourced also from their special role at the border; in the 15th and 16th century Turkish attacks on Slovenian territory were quite frequent.
9 See Melik (1958); Melik explains in his regional monograph, that coal mining (brown coal) in Kočevje was among the best-equipped in technical sense at that time in the monarchy. The mining stopped in the 1960s because of difficulties with water and mud.
decrease. During the course of the 19th century, the region was protected by special measures, due to its ethnic structure. German-language primary and secondary schools were opened and the cultural activities supported. Nevertheless, this could not halt the steady emigration from the area, which did not halt until the First World War. After 1920 the area became part of the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenians and was later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The new state limited and later forbade the German schools and cultural life and topographical names were ‘slovenianised’. The unhappiness of the German minority with this treatment lead many Gotscheer-Germans to become members of the Volksdeutsche Mannschaft\(^{10}\), when it was established in 1939. After Hitler and Mussolini attacked Yugoslavia in April 1941 this territory became the object of much strategic manoeuvring. Finally, it became part of the ‘Ljubljana province’ of Italy. According to the agreement reached between Hitler and Mussolini, all Germans were given the ‘option’ to emigrate to the Third Reich. Between November 1941 and February 1942 almost the entire Gotscheer population (nearly 18,000) moved to the region north of the Save river in Lower Styria, an area previously settled by Slovenians. 37,000 Slovenians were deported to Croatia and Serbia or to concentration camps in central Germany. Many of the deported Slovenians died of starvation or were killed.\(^{11}\)

Only a few of the Gotscheer-Germans remained in their homeland, particularly the ethnically mixed families in the peripheral areas of Kočevsko. The Italians created the state-company ‘Enomai’\(^{12}\) in order to produce food, and began with forestry, but the partisan forces were too strong. The company was never really able to begin its operations and the Italian fascist forces burnt down all of the Gotscheer villages. What little remained was later destroyed during the Italian military actions against partisan troops. After the war the Gotscheer people had nothing to come back to. Their villages and the city of Kočevje had been destroyed and most Gotscheer left with German army. Many settled in Austrian Carinthia as well in the other (predominantly ethnic German) locations in central and western Europe.\(^{13}\) Later the communist authorities decided that the German minority had to be deported and those who had not left the country as part of the first wave of refugees to Carinthia had to leave the country immediately. The region gradually reverted to its previous natural form: the percentage of woodland increased from 41% to more than 70%.\(^{14}\) And a culture was tragically forgotten.

### 3.2. The story of the Partisans

Soon after the Axis attack on the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and the defeat of the Yugoslav army, some of the Slovenians organised themselves into an organisation called the “Osvobodilna fronta” (Liberation front) in April 1941. Different groups from different political orientations participated. Very soon, the communists gained greater control, taking over officially in mid-1942.

A bloody civil war ensued among the Slovenians. The communists organised a partisan liberation army. Initially they controlled only small, mainly locally-operated military groups, but by the end of the war the communist-led Slovenian partisans controlled

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\(^{10}\) See Biber (1960); A similar explanation is also given in Nečak (1998).

\(^{11}\) See Ferenc (1968).

\(^{12}\) For further information see Mikuž (1960): 132-166.


\(^{14}\) See Slovenija. Pokrajina in ljude (1996), a regional monography of Slovenia.
a strong, well-organised and well-equipped army, which was part of the Yugoslav partisan army that controlled the entire former Yugoslav territory.

The aim of the partisans was twofold: national liberation as part of the anti-fascist coalition and at the same time a revolution and change of social as well as political order. Their opponents were predominantly right-wing but anti-fascist oriented groups. To avoid too high casualties in the population and their own numbers, they avoided fighting the Italian, German and Hungarian military forces, but to achieve this they had to collaborate in various ways at first with the Italians, and later also with the German military and civil authorities.

The civil war together with the Italian and German attacks caused high losses among the civilian population. Many people were killed or sent to concentration camps in Italy (particularly to Gonars and Rab) and to the Third Reich to concentration camps like Auschwitz or Dachau. The occupying forces undertook several military actions against the partisan movement, but without any real success, and the partisans grew stronger and stronger. Ljubljana, the capital and largest town in the Slovenian territories was occupied. Partisans needed safe havens for military as well for civil affairs. Kočevski Rog, a karstic plateau situated deep in the woods and abandoned by the Gotscheers as a result of the Hitler-Mussolini agreement, was ideal for these purposes. The forest served as an excellent place for the Slovenian partisans' military headquarters. Kočevski rog was also the place where the partisans organised hospitals. The Slovenian partisan army leadership as well as political leadership of the National Liberation Front was also located in Kočevski rog as were support services for this political and military leadership. Their strong locations and their well-hidden nature, meant that most of these locations (numbering more than twenty) survived the four years of war. Hospitals operated hidden deep in the woodlands and saved many lives under very difficult circumstances. Some books, newspapers and other printed materials were produced in partisan shops. They even repaired and produced weapons. In Kočevski rog there were even cultural and educational services, including a scholarly institute, a radio station and a place for drama, opera and ballet. Kočevski Rog was a liberated area within the occupied territory. In Kočevje in October 1943, shortly after the Italian troops had capitulated, the delegates from different Slovenian regions and representative of different social groups convened for the first parliament to make some important political decisions.

3.3. Kočevski Rog became a mass-graves territory. The story of one massacre

After its liberation from the Nazi and fascist occupation in May 1945 most of the people celebrated. However, not all celebrated, particularly in Kočevje and Kočevski Rog. The chronicle of the destroyed city began in May 1945 and became one of the bloodiest chapters in its history, tragic for all involved, not only for the victims but also their executors. The story began in southern Carinthia, in refugee camps where more than 12,000 ‘domobranci’, anti-communist troops, and many thousands of Slovenian civilians wanted to escape from Yugoslav territory fearing possible partisan retaliation. The British and US

15 See Jarc (1977).
16 See Mikuž (1960).
17 Zgodovina Slovencev (1979): 675-682.
18 See more in Mikuž (1960), Vol. 4, pp. 183-.
military authorities, present at that time in Austrian Carinthia, sent most of the anti-communist military formations back to ‘Tito’s’ partisans. Only a few of them escaped in time to avoid the tragic destiny that awaited most of those who returned. They were returned in enclosed trains to Ljubljana and further to Kočevje and other places and practically all where killed or thrown into the karstic caves, without any judicial processes. The exact number of people who died is unknown to the present day but is estimated at more than 60,000 people, mostly Slovenian ‘domobranci’, but also Croatian ‘ustaše’ as well as German soldiers (Prince Eugen Group) and some Serbian ‘četniks’. The partisans destroyed many villages and committed several war crimes. Kočevski Rog is therefore the site of many thousands of individual fates: hopes, loves and hates, most of them abruptly ended by a shot in the neck. For a long time, no-one was supposed to know about this story.

3.4. From stories to heritage

In the socialist period from 1945 to 1991 three interpretations of the past of the Kočevsko region existed and in that time the previously culturalised landscape had largely reverted back to its natural environment. Firstly, the region as the forgotten land of the Gotscheers and their lost culture, secondly, the region connected with the tragic fate of the domobranci and others, whose bones today remain there in mass graves in the karstic caves, and lastly the various victorious interpretations of partisan defence. The memories connected with Kočevsko after the Second World War are therefore of the two tragedies and one victory! Until 1991 only one of these was a tourist attraction. The Slovenian Parliament passed a special law for preserving Kočevski Rog and all other monuments of the partisan activities there during the war. It became an important monument commemorating anti-fascist resistance. The most famous of these is the so-called “Baza 20”, the military and political headquarter of partisan troops, receiving up to 70,000 visitors per year, particularly elementary and secondary school students and other groups. Kočevski Rog was also of interest for visitors because of the large and well-protected woodlands and the wildlife, particularly large carnivores such as the brown bear, lynx, and wolves, which also attracted hunters. The heritage of the Gotscheers and their culture was neglected by the communist authorities, and as a result was almost forgotten, covered by the ashes of time. The tragic end of the domobranci and other peoples was taboo.

The political changes at the beginning of the 1990s opened the doors for new ideas and old stories. The mysterious silence of those forgotten and forbidden memories, buried under the cover of the green forest has been broken, and suddenly the stories began taking their place in history. In the 1980s there had already been a developmental programme for peripheral Slovenian regions, and Kočevsko was among them. Researchers began to rediscover the forgotten and (almost) lost culture of the Gotscheers and then, step by step, reconstructed some remains of their material culture. The municipalities started to look for new developmental opportunities for the region in tourism. The potential of this history to become heritage was recognised, although much of the physical evidence is no longer and much remains unknown. The second phase of the story provided an opportunity for the Gotscheer people themselves. They created a cultural organisation and opened a small museum in the village Občice, not far from the famous Dolenjske Toplice spa.

19 See Kos (1986).
20 Also mentioned in Jančar (ed.; 1997). Several personal stories about mass killings in Kočevski Rog are told by surviving witnesses in Muhič (1998) and in Dejak (ed.; 1998).
Unfortunately, the organisation fell in the typical ‘minority trap’ and became a tool of political manipulation for the Austrian politicians to apply pressure\(^{21}\) on Slovenia in the Slovenian EU-membership negotiation process.

The third story also began to be revived in the late 1980s. Some new books were written and lectures given on the happenings of summer 1945. Some mass graves (karstic caves), particularly the two largest Under Kren and Under Macesnova gorica became places of pilgrimage. In July 1990 more than 10,000 people gathered at a holy mass dedicated to all the post-war victims of mass-kilings in summer 1945. Some small monuments have also been erected and there is an inscription that reads, “We also died for the homeland” (“Tudi mi smo umrli za domovino”). The forbidden story has become a part of Slovenian history. And more than that, it has become part of historical heritage. This is, however, not sufficient to bring about reconciliation between the former adversaries during the Second World War. Both sides have their own, separate truths and old survivors and their successors are still nursing painful memories.

The partisan memorial places in Kočevoški Rog and in Baza 20 retained their position. They still have visitors, though considerably fewer than during socialism. Even with their clear humanist orientation (culture, hospitals) and clever conspirator,\(^{22}\) this monument to anti-fascist and anti-Nazi resistance has been largely forgotten now. The revolutionary past is no longer as easy to commemorate, as in the light of new interpretation it now has to include things such as the mass executions of war and post-war. Three stories, three destinies, three different memories.

4. THE CONCEPT OF CHANGING THE HISTORICAL HERITAGE INTO DEVELOPMENTAL POTENTIAL

Kočevoško has three different faces. The richness of its colourful history has, however, not yet brought about any developmental opportunities. The reasons are to be found in its specific local history. The region was more supervised and access to it is not as easy as in other Slovenian areas. Some developmental programmes have tried to incorporate selected historic places in local tourism offerings, but it seems that after 1991 the region has retained only one symbol, the brown bear, the real king of the large wild karstic forests of Kočevoško.

On the other hand, all three of the stories mentioned, victorious and tragic, are quite clearly important historical events and as such offer development opportunities. Many Gotscheers from all over the world would like to visit their ancestors’ graves and the area where they once lived. Likewise thousands of Slovenians would visit the mass graves every year and if Baza 20 were also to receive as many visitors as in the past, the historical heritage of Kočevoško could present serious development potential. The crucial question, however, is how to combine three separate stories within the common history of the region, and how to market this. One suggestion is called the “common memorial historical park”, though at present this is still an idea.

\(^{21}\) Actually, here Haider’s confrontation of the Carinthian Slovenians (i.e. the Slovenian minority in Austria) takes centre-stage here.

The facilities for the memorial park should be built on several locations with its centre in the city of Kočevje. The museum should collect artefacts from all three stories separately and at the end offer the visitor the chance to learn from the lessons told and look toward the future: “Let past emotions be the past, and think for the future. Learn from history and forget the hate!”

There follows a choice of different routes and stories. Different facilities in several locations can help relate parts of the stories, underpinned by explanatory background context. These ‘learning routes’ could be devised to provide special opportunities for school groups and can include locations such as the mass graves, some ‘partisan’ locations such as Baza 20, and the reconstruction of Gotscheer houses or villages. The natural scenery and areas of special interest in the natural environment (such as the protected forests, caves in the karstic limestone etc.) are also potential ‘stations’ on this route. In the surrounding area there are some further places of interest which, although not strictly part of the Kočevsko region, could also be integrated into a larger network of heritage sites, e.g. the spa at Dolenjske Toplice, a Črnomelj museum (also of the Second World War) in Dvor on the Krka river, an old steel factory and watermill on the Kolpa river and Kostel castle. Visitors could also see the canyons in the Upper Kolpa valley. There are some very interesting karstic caves, for instance, Snežna jama (Snow cave) on Goteniška gora, Željnske jame, known also as Ciganske jame (Gipsy caves) or Bilpa not far from Kostel.

The central premise of the memorial park must lie deep in human history. Seeking for the truth is not enough. The message must be stronger than painful memories and individual stories, not just for those directly or indirectly (by ancestors) involved in the stories. It must offer an opportunity for the visitor to understand forgiveness and transcend the events, and an opportunity to compare these with similar ‘stories’ from around Europe or even the world. The memorial park should not provide the context for confrontation but for reconciliation and looking forward: the joint task to care for a common future, without avoiding the truths of history, however painful! Visitors should be given the opportunity to understand personal and collective destinies, to understand time and the communities within the larger context of what has happened in the past. And last but not least, that these stories are clearly part of the history of Europe, and also of the present. Let it be a teaching model for the future!

If such an initiative can convey an important message to visitors from within and outside the country, we can expect to find financial support, and through this the opportunity for positive regional development. The park should help the people to overcome former barriers and frontiers and put Kočevsko as an important memorial site on the European historical and cultural map. To be known means to be important. The story has become history, and also heritage.

In this case, three different stories are to become one common heritage that can represent a developmental potential, a regional resource and a tourism offering.

5. CONCLUSION. DESPITE ALL BARRIERS: HOW TO PUT THE IDEA INTO PRACTICE

The idea of the historical memorial park presented above is an idea put forward by the author. A lot of research and organisational work will be needed to put it into practice. In order to realise it, funding may be needed not only from local and regional sources but
also from national (Slovenian) and probably also European sources of funding. The personal destinies are small pieces of a larger national historical context that involves many neighbouring countries. In this context, the park represents a place of remembrance both for the nation as well as for Europe and as such, we hope, is an ideal candidate for a larger European project.

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