

The Heritage of Socialism in Škofja Loka as an Opportunity for Tourism Development

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In recent years, the heritage of socialism has found its way into the tourist services of many eastern European cities, where it is being successfully marketed through various tourist products. Since this kind of heritage is also present in Slovenia, we believe that by developing these kinds of tourist products, together with their appropriate presentation and organization, socialist heritage tourism services could be offered by the municipalities of many Slovene towns and cities, including Škofja Loka, the subject of this paper. We have used qualitative semi-structured interviews with four selected tourism stakeholders in the region and have obtained their positions regarding the integration of socialist heritage into the tourism range of services in the municipality of Škofja Loka. We also present the heritage of socialism and proposals for new sustainable tourist products based on the relics of socialism.

Keywords: heritage of socialism, Škofja Loka, sustainable tourist products, tourism stakeholders, tourism development

Introduction

Socialism was present until the end of the 1980s in most of eastern and southeastern Europe. Yugoslavia, which included Slovenia, established a self-governing socialist system, which was different from the Warsaw Pact socialist regimes and was considered “softer” than them. The period after World War II was marked by a changed socio-political situation as a result of the establishment of socialism as the dominant social-political system. From 1945 onward, the socialist management of space caused substantial spatial and social change as a result of systematic industrialization aimed at achieving modernization (Vrišer, 1978). This had obvious effects on major cities, but also in smaller municipalities such as Škofja Loka. The consequences are currently seen in towns and society and represent the cultural heritage of socialism, which consists of a variety of architectural relics and an intangible heritage.

After the fall of socialism, transitions in various places were characterized by the complexities of politics, which is evident from the way cities are being or have been transformed, where space has been re-valued, and places re-created with new identities and images (Rätz *et al.*, 2008). In relation to this general process, tourism products based on the heritage of socialism have been successfully integrated into the range tourism services of former socialist countries, including Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary, with the heritage of socialism becoming a successful market niche in these countries. Among the most numerous consumers are visitors from the United States and Western European countries that did not experience the socialist socio-political system and, therefore, are not intimately familiar with socialist regimes (Ivanov, 2009). We believe that the heritage of socialism, with arranged selected tourism products, must be included in the tourism services

of Škofja Loka, as the elements of socialist/communist heritage that became tourist attractions in other European former socialist countries (Light, 2000a, 2000b), such as the Lenin Monument in Bucharest (Richardson & Burford, 1995).

Škofja Loka is currently focussed primarily, in fact almost exclusively, on the Medieval heritage of the town (and naturally so), but need not exclusively do so for the tourist trade. This would thus represent an innovation in Škofja Loka, at the same time upgrading the existing range of tourism services. Because the designation of sustainable tourism products requires a broad consensus of stakeholders, interviews conducted among tourism industry stakeholders, including at a regional development agency and a local museum, tourist agency and hotel, were analysed. Selected stakeholders from different tourism branches represent both the public and private sectors within the tourism industry of the region as a whole. The semi-structured interviews were related to the position of these stakeholders on the inclusion of the heritage of socialism into the range of tourism services, its process of integration, and potential dilemmas that could arise as a result. Such approaches are necessary in order to assess the feasibility of potential profitability and other objectives (given the varied natures of shareholders compromise in planning is essential), so as to smooth the path of the development process and provide direction and support to marketing (Swarbrooke, 2002). Furthermore, this paper provides various proposals for the integration of various relics of socialism into the range of tourism services based on appearance, functions, physical positions and typological diversity. These tourism products can be arranged in a variety of sustainable ways: the establishment of museums, expansion of existing museum collections, creation of info-points, souvenir shops, history lectures, and the creation of learning pathways (again, this list is guided by best practices in other former socialist countries as applied to tourism (Papp & Raffay, 2011)).

In conclusion, the importance and promotion of the integration of industrial heritage in tourism are highlighted. In addition, the importance of the involvement and participation of all potential actors in the realization of new tourist products of sustainable tourism on the local, regional, and national levels is emphasized.

Heritage of Socialism in Škofja Loka

Socialism in Škofja Loka, as elsewhere, brought about changes in the physical and social realms, and left its heritage, which reveals itself in the form of various relics (Balažič, 2010). As relics represent a part of cultural heritage, we should first explain the concept of cultural heritage. The Institute for the Protection of the Cultural Heritage of Slovenia defines cultural heritage as sources and evidence of human history and culture regardless of origin, development and level of preservation (tangible/material heritage), and the cultural assets associated with this (intangible/non-material heritage). The primary function of cultural heritage is its direct incorporation into the physical realm and the active life within it, chiefly in education, the transfer of knowledge and experience from past periods of history, and the strengthening of national originality and cultural authenticity (ZVKDS, 2012).

Relics of socialism are the result of socialist rule and represent a phenomenon of that time. These are the physical phenomena of the time, economic and housing facilities, perhaps entire suburban settlements or separate buildings, nationalized agricultural land and other buildings in the area, such as monuments, particularly the National Liberation War (WW2) monuments, and are typologically different because they are the result of human management of the physical realm in various fields, such industry, settlement, agriculture and ideology (Balažič, 2010). Relics belong to the categories of cultural heritage previously mentioned and can be divided into relics of industry, settlement, agriculture and ideology. Currently, physical relics of socialism represent an important historical, social, technical and political expression of what socialism used to be in the physical and social realms.

A word about industrial heritage might be instructive here, because the process of industrialization was very different across historical time and space. For instance, the heritage of industrialization in 18th century England was a far different set of circumstances than in countries that were industrialized nearly two centuries later. In fact, in a place like Škofja Loka, which was virtually not industrialized until the socialist era, it may be said that the process was a particularly socialist process.

Relics of industry in Škofja Loka are closely linked with industrialization, which took place soon after the implementation of the new political system in 1945 and up until the late 1970s. Industrialization left its mark in both smaller and larger Slovenian cities; the share of the industrial population increased from 11% to 19% within a few years. According to the number of employees, the metals industry ranked first, followed by the textile, wood and chemical industries. This development also included industries that previously did not exist: electrical engineering, chemicals, mechanical engineering (Vrišer, 1978).

Among the most important factories in Škofja Loka relevant to the time of industrialization are the factory of Gorenjska predilnica, LTH, a refrigerator factory, and Šešir, a hat factory (Nedižavec, 2011). Upon nationalization in 1945, Gorenjska predilnica became a social property. After a rapid economic rise and high revenue, in 1975 they made a substantial investment, introducing a new process of spinning cotton and synthetic fibres, which achieved higher productivity. The crisis in the textile industry at the end of the 1990s, which resulted in the advantage of Asian textile companies over European ones, left Gorenjska predilnica facing restructuring. Starting in the 1960s, LTH had a reputation for producing high quality compressors for refrigerators, coolers and freezers; it was founded in the 1930s. During the socialist era, it was renamed Loška tovarna hladilnikov (LTH, which means "Loška factory of refrigerators"). Until the collapse of Yugoslavia, the company was successful, but soon after suffered its first losses and incurred debt. Since then, production has declined. In 2002, 500 workers were employed (Mrdja, 2005).

These companies were all established before World War II, but started operating on a larger scale in the 1960s, when economic circumstances became quite favourable. All major companies of the region had their headquarters in the Tara industrial zone of in Škofja Loka, next to the railway line. Several other companies failed or were required to drastically alter their ownership structures and reduce the number of employees since the year 2000. One of them is Šešir, the hat factory, which was established in 1921. The factory reached its zenith around 1960 (Planina, 1976). Currently, it is still operating but at a significantly reduced capacity.



Figure 1: Šešir hats factory
Source: Žiga Nedižavec

The development of industry has influenced the development and expansion of the suburban settlements of Podlubnik, Frankovo and Groharjevo, which represent the relic of settlement. Such settlements were located on the edges of the town and built mostly in the 1970s. These settlements primarily consisted of multi-storey blocks that were built next to each other, often in groups, with little architectural flourish.

As a consequence of industrialization, the share of the rural population between 1948 and 1971 fell from 44% to just over 20% (Vrišer, 1978). The post-war period was characterized by a process of agrarian reform, the result of which was land consolidation, and modernization of the countryside under then principles of development, which was a priority of the authorities. Post-war changes in agriculture had a substantial impact on land treatment, and its effects remain visible today. "De-agrarianization" and the collapse of many small agricultural holdings was common. Among the relics of agricultural changes are agricultural cooperatives, which represent not only architectural cultural heritage but also the heritage of rural life. Their main role was the trade of general consumables, distribution of fertilizers and materials for reproduction. Furthermore, they familiarized farmers with new working methods, machinery, and crops. An example of an agricultural cooperative is Log near Škofja Loka.



Figure 2: Agricultural cooperative in Log near Škofja Loka

Source: Žiga Nedižavec



Figure 4: Naming a street in Škofja Loka

Source: Žiga Nedižavec

After World War II, numerous monuments, commemorative plaques and memorials to meritorious individuals during the war of liberation were erected. Such monuments represent the building heritage of ideology, while the naming of streets, squares and other institutions to emphasize the importance of prominent socialist figures maintain a strong symbolic and ideological function, representing socialism's intangible heritage. Both types of heritage are relics of ideology. One such example is the monument to the fallen soldiers of WWII war and victims of fascist violence, built in 1962 in Godešič, and another dedicated to 50 hostages who were shot during the war in Kamnitnik. Some examples of intangible relics are Demšar Street, Boris Kidrič Street, Franko-



Figure 3: Monument of National Liberation War in Godešič

Source: Žiga Nedižavec

vo settlement, etc. Most such streets and institutions have retained their names to the present time (ZAL, 1948).

Methodology – Analysis of Interviews of Tourism Industry Representatives

In order to determine the position of stakeholders regarding the integration of the heritage of socialism into the range of tourism services, we conducted four semi-structured interviews with leading representatives of the tourism industry in Škofja Loka and the surrounding area.

We took this approach rather than make a suggestive study among local inhabitants for a few reasons. First, in general, any new ideas that promise the possibility of extra income are usually eagerly adopted. Second, the issue of Slovenia's relationship with her past is simultaneously and complex, and our intent here is not to examine this topic. From what we know anecdotally, Slovenes who lived as adults during socialist times have very favourable memories of that period, but given the failure of post-independence economics to retain the best aspects of socialism (such as economic security) and add to these benefits without ill effect, we cannot draw fair conclusions without extensive study. Finally, we believe that any evident opening for expanded tourism is to be explored, and if it is not in any way destructive, it is of obvious value; this cultural/historical/intellectual notion of an immersion into socialist life is likely to appeal to some number of Westerners immedi-

ately, and, once established, is relatively low maintenance and thus likely to endure indefinitely; such as, for instance, the castle in Škofja Loka.

Interviewees were leading persons in companies and organizations: a consultant for regional development and tourism development at the Sora development agency, the Director of the Loški Museum, the director of incoming overseas travel at the Kompas Slovenia travel agency, and the marketing manager at one of the hotels in Bled. We included just a relative few diverse stakeholders of the region of interest, for one thing, because of the limited resources available to us; but, second, we were comfortable in doing so because the involvement of more parties, such as other professors and other public figures, would inevitably lead to a less traceable complex of conflicting interests, and conflicting interests would inevitably arise once a second party were included. Our goal is merely to establish the grounds for discussion of such a project before attempting a more comprehensive study.

All the interviewees were asked the same or similar questions.

The first question sought to determine in what detail interviewees know the range of tourism services based on the heritage of socialism in Slovenia and abroad. The responses showed poor knowledge about the issue, which is understandable in the case of Slovenia, because this kind of tourism service is underdeveloped. The most familiar are the director of the leading Slovenian tour operator and the hotel marketing manager. They both know of some examples of “socialist tourist attractions” associated with the former Yugoslavian leader Tito (for example, his birthplace at Kumrovac and his villa in Bled). Moreover, in relation to range of tourism services featuring the heritage of socialism, the interviewees highlighted examples of industrial heritage tourism in eastern European countries and Slovenia. Among those mentioned were different factories in Silesia and the former German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and Jesenice in Slovenia, where adventure parks and museums have been created in recent years.

Through the second and third questions, we obtained concrete answers regarding the “reasonableness” of implementing the heritage of socialism into the range of tourism services in Škofja Loka. The director from Kompas accepted the idea with enthusi-

asm and was ready to work on the implementation of such heritage into existing tourist arrangements for Škofja Loka with adequate participation of local tourism representatives (especially the local tourism organization (LTO)). He said that such an offer would be of interest to visitors from the USA, who could explore their roots in Slovenia and would like to know the places where their ancestors lived, as well as those interested in socialism as a political system in Yugoslavia. This is so-called “tailor-made” travel.

The idea of integrating the heritage of socialism into the range of tourism services seemed unattractive to all the other interviewees. The most openly expressed view came from the hotel marketing manager, who believed that such an offer is not suitable for the destination and would be generally unattractive for foreign guests. He believes that the Gorenjska region should be primarily marketed as an idyllic natural heritage region. The director of the Loški Museum and the consultant from the Sora agency shared this opinion. They stated the belief that it would be necessary to develop Škofja Loka as a “medieval” tourist town, believing that that should be the trademark of the town.

When asked if their company or organization would involve itself in implementing this type of tourism- only the marketing manager from the hotel expressed a strongly contrary opinion, while the museum director and consultant replied cautiously that they did not “mind” such a bid, but doubted that the project would be successful. The director from Kompas believed that such an offer would mean a “refreshment” and innovation in the Slovenian tourist market but that it would be necessary to follow the successful marketing cases from abroad, such as the that for heritage of socialism in Hungary and Poland, but also there were relevant examples of heritage tourism in Slovenia, such as that of the Soška Front in the Soča valley. All the interviewees believed that it would be necessary to ensure high quality and effective marketing before implementing new tourism products that would result in new tourists flows to Škofja Loka. They also agreed that it would be necessary to do market research at the beginning to determine whether such tourism products would be interesting to tourists at all, as well as which segment of tourists should be targeted (young, middle age, domestic, foreign, etc.).

The last question was about the major obstacles in the implementation of the heritage of socialism into the range of tourism service. We received the most concrete response from the Sora consultant, highlighting the following: finance, and the mentality and openness of the local population to such a proposal. In the latter case, the issue is that it might be difficult to avoid politicization of the issue, pitting those in favour against those against. It would probably take some time before people entirely accept socialism as a part of cultural heritage. All four agreed that a problem might arise when an individual tourism representative would apply for financial backing, and they also foresaw complications in the area of marketing and in the segmentation of tourists. Some argue that such an offer is suitable for the elderly foreign tourists, others that it is worth focusing on younger visitors, including students that do not know much about socialism, and that tourism products should take on an educational role. They also emphasize the proper B2B cooperation of all stakeholders and integration with other Slovenian destinations, with the aim of the providing a fully rounded range of the tourism services. This problem reflects the organization of Slovenian tourism, which is, unfortunately, insufficiently developed, with the Gorenjska region in particular falling short of its potential.

On the basis of the above findings from the interviews, we can presume that tourism stakeholders are for the most part unfamiliar with tourism based on socialist heritage abroad. Three of the four we interviewed generally thought that the inclusion of the heritage of socialism would enrich the range of tourism services in the region. One of them was against the integration of heritage of socialism into range of tourism services Škofja Loka. One would be prepared to invest partly, and two of them thought that such integration would contribute to greater recognizability of the region. Regarding problems that may arise in the process of integration, all of them agreed that the key factor would be the role of individual tourism representatives in financing and the means of marketing and segmentation of tourists. One of them also highlighted the sensitive attitude towards this kind of heritage of the local population, because it is still linked with the nexus of politics and recent history.

Integration of Socialist Cultural Heritage into Tourism Offer of Škofja Loka

The number of tourists travelling to Eastern Europe in recent years has increased. One of the main reasons is the refreshed tourism serves of destinations targeting special tourist segments (Prosser, 2001). Furthermore, “alternative” or “niche tourism”, which may both overlap with socialist heritage tourism, are becoming increasingly prevalent. We believe that the heritage of socialism represents great tourism potential, and we have formed proposals for the integration of this kind of heritage into the range of tourism services. These proposals are tightly linked to relics of socialism such as those we presented.

We suggest an arrangement of relics of industry and other types of relics in a sustainable way as research demonstrates the growing demand for tourist visits to environmentally responsible destinations (UNWTO, 2012). Relics of industry may form a thematic pathway in a factory area and an exhibition of industry in one of the existing factories, for example, LTH or Šešir; the establishment of a souvenir shop; an exhibition of relics of socialism in the Škofja Loka Museum; and the reconstruction of the agricultural cooperative as a building heritage site. An upgrade of the socialist heritage tourism would be a thematic excursion entitled “Trail of socialism, with academic lecturers” and a special integrated travel arrangement, “Life in socialism”. Cities such as Berlin and Prague, Gdansk and Sofia, all have socialist landscapes, once functioning as intended, now remaining as recognized relics of that era; some require no external designation, some have been revived as thematic touristic products, in certain instances (Czepczyński, 2008). Of importance is that in the cities we cite, for both the local inhabitants and the current tourism stakeholders, these additional tourism services in no way detract from the circumstances – touristic and otherwise – of these cities, just as the medieval focus of Škofja Loka’s tourism need not be altered; in fact, one ought to recognize here the fate of larger and more complex cities (to name one even more complex than Berlin or Gdansk, there is Istanbul) that have many layers of history, all of them “on offer” at all times. In this regard, one might understand that tourist services, in some aspects, reflect historical processes.

A factory may decide to open a museum on the industry's history while inviting visitors to tour the existing factory as well (a common example of successfully implementing this idea structurally is to be found in innumerable breweries). Thus, the tourism product would have several possible components, such as a factory tour, a purpose-built visitor centre, catering facilities and shops selling the company's products themselves (this would seem especially apt for the hat factory) as well as in the form of souvenirs (Yale, 2004). Former local factories present a precise and profound industrial and technical heritage and should be included in the range of tourism services of Škofja Loka. We also recommend a short thematic pathway and exhibition that would represent working conditions in the factories, industrial development, principle industrial products, and the life of the typical socialist working man. It is also possible to reorganize a factory hall into a museum or small souvenir shop, or both. LTH and Šešir are suitable factories for reorganization for such tourism purposes.

Tourists are often reminded of their visited destination through the souvenirs they purchase; therefore, it would be reasonable to establish souvenir shops, where visitors might buy several products linked to socialism, such as umbrellas, T-shirts, pens and other products with socialist motifs. Since Tito's cult of personality is still recognizable in Western countries and the USA, it would be appropriate to sell a set of souvenirs related to him (Balažič, 2011). Souvenir shops should focus on the personality of Tito as president, marshal and national hero, his image displayed on a variety of items. Miniature models of socialist block buildings (Podlubnik) in Škofja Loka and factory models (LTH) might also be made available.

Another proposal for a tourism service is the opening of both permanent and temporary exhibitions of socialism in the Museum of Škofja Loka that would present the period from 1945 to 1990. The emphasis would be on different social spheres. The museum collection could include displays of aspects of daily life, politics, history, sports, education, the military, media and art from the socialist era. Aside from the tourist value, such exhibitions would also provide an important educational and cultural function. The museum would be suitably equipped for ed-

ucational purposes and would thus be of interest to young visitors from Slovenia and visitors from Western Europe and the USA. Among notable exhibitions would be those concerning the visit Tito to Škofja Loka (1973), celebrating of Dan borca 4. julij (Warrior's Day July 4th), Štafeta mladosti (Relay of Youth), etc. The exhibition could be modelled on the successful Museum of Communism in Prague, Czech Republic; however, it is important to stress that here is a very pronounced distinction between Yugoslav socialism and that of countries directly under USSR control, and any museum in this region would necessarily reflect that.

Agricultural cooperatives played an important role in local farmers' lives after World War II. With the reorganization of one of the agricultural cooperatives, we could display rural life from that period. We suggest the opening of an exhibit that would include the collection of various materials, documents and photos that represent farming and the everyday life of local farmers. It would be a very good idea to organize a market for tourists where it would be possible to buy only local agricultural products that were available during the socialist era.

A thematic excursion entitled "Trail of socialism, with academic lectures" would also include academic lectures in addition to sightseeing of socialist relics. This excursion is appropriate for domestic and especially foreign students, and also for tourists who are interested in cultural heritage. Co-organizers of the excursion could be educational institutions, including local high schools, universities and institutes. At the beginning of such an excursion, students could go sightseeing and learn about monuments and memorial plaques such as Kamnitnik and Dom zveze borcev za vrednote NOB Škofja Loka. Meanwhile, students would complete assignments given them by the organizer. Furthermore, they would visit the typical suburban settlement of Podlubnik and Šešir. The tourist guide and history professor would play an important role in the presentation of these two socialist relics. The thematic excursion would be completed with a typical working lunch, and participants would receive a souvenir, perhaps a Young Pioneers hat from the period of socialism. Naturally, these are but suggestions used here to give a full idea of what this type of tourism could be like; in practice, a vari-

ety of alternatives are available (for instance, see Ivanov 2009, for similar ideas in Bulgaria).

Our final proposal is an integrated travel arrangement. The tourist package would include, for example, two overnight stays in a typically socialist flat; rental of a car typical of the era, such as a Zastava; purchasing of foodstuffs in a socialist grocery store, where only essential goods of famous brands from the period of socialism are available; and guests might wear clothes from that era (jeans, working clothes, etc.) and take part in an authentic (if replicated) socialist celebration.

To make this experience truly authentic, tourists should stay in a socialist apartment complex, a sort of heritage hotel. A key role would be played by the equipment in the rooms and the interior design. The apartment itself would be a theme park. In order to internalize the experience to the utmost, the tourist should adapt to the environment, which means the exclusion of more modern devices, such as mobile phones, laptops or other electronic devices that were not known and used in the era of socialism. Guests would take care of food and beverages by using the grocery in the neighbourhood, cook for themselves with recipes available in the apartment. A concession would be the inclusion of a canteen, which would offer only basic meals, again typical of the socialist era.

We are well aware of the massive capital investment that would be necessary for implementing this kind of tourist product, but we believe that such innovation is necessary for the success of future tourism in Slovenia. The ideas must be put in place following successful similar examples and in consideration of the market situation. In addition, as our study is somewhat impressionistic, given the few stakeholders interviewed, a more comprehensive study would be beneficial before any final version of the project is initiated. Eventually, if properly implemented and advertized, such a destination would become recognized and well known abroad.

Conclusion

Škofja Loka, despite its rich cultural and natural heritage, is one of the least developed tourist towns in Slovenia. Therefore, we conducted interviews with stakeholders of the local tourism industry to obtain their views on the integration of heritage socialism into the range of the tourism services of Škofja Loka.

We believe that new tourism products derived from the heritage of socialism that can be sustainably arranged would contribute to a new start for tourism in Škofja Loka and attract both domestic and foreign tourists. In this regard, we have created some tourism products based on the heritage of socialism that would enrich the existing range of tourism services in Škofja Loka.

Although some persistently reject the integration of the heritage of socialism into the tourism services and products in Škofja Loka, because this kind of heritage is believed to be inappropriate and of potentially troublesome political controversy, it would be an innovation on the tourism market not only in Škofja Loka but also in Slovenia. The interviews that we conducted showed that tourism stakeholders do not know much about this kind of tourism product from abroad, but are generally sufficiently interested that it would make sense to move forward with the idea. Some of them are willing to support and engage themselves in the process of making new tourist products as they represent an innovation for the Slovenian market.

We are aware that our proposals for the integration of the heritage of socialism is only one small step forward and that much remains to be done in this regard. Integrating the heritage of socialism into tourism requires the cooperation of tourism stakeholders and, furthermore, the fulfilment of conditions such as (foremost) the adoption of a holistic program, for the innovative aspect of our proposal is offering the possibility to *live* socialism. These proposals address the stakeholders in the hope of reaching consensus in the process of creating tourism products. Other conditions for advancement on this path include using the concept of sustainable tourism wherein *all* stakeholders are actively playing their allotted roles, which means emphasizing the intensive involvement of the local population. The process of creating tourism products should include all tourism stakeholders in Škofja Loka, starting with the Škofja Loka municipal government and the Sora Development Agency, which could help with the financing and arrangement of facilities. Financial funding could be obtained within the framework of EU projects. Local travel agencies would take on a significant role in the field of marketing and would have the responsibility of designing new tourism products and services, in-

cluding arranging the involvement of local inhabitants. This would, of course, mean new jobs. Currently, Škofja Loka has only 196 permanent beds in the accommodation facilities (SURS, 2012), and no hotel; this too must be taken into account and, as we have suggested in line with our thesis, in order to offer a truly authentic experience for tourists the hotel may be located within the settlements constructed during the time of socialism.

We can conclude that with proper support from the local community and investors the realization of new sustainable tourism products based on the heritage of socialism in Škofja Loka, tourism would be given a new impetus and thus contribute to the promotion of Škofja Loka as a destination and Slovenia as a country.

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