

# SOLČAVSKO KOT PRIMER LOKALNE ODGOVORNOSTI IN INTEGRALNE ZELENE EKONOMIJE

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**Povzetek:** Besedilo predstavlja območje Solčavskega skozi zorni kot koncepta integralne zelene ekonomije. Okvir predstavlja razvojna pot Solčavskega in opredelitev ključnih elementov trajnosti na njej. Nacionalni projekt študijskih krožkov je v tem okviru razumljen kot uporabna pobuda. Ovrednotenje razvoja Solčavskega podajamo na podlagi analize trajnosti in z usmeritvijo v celovito zeleno ekonomijo.

**Ključne besede:** Solčavsko, Slovenija, lokalni razvoj, trajnost, integralna zelena ekonomija

## SOLČAVSKO AS A CASE OF LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY AND INTEGRAL GREEN ECONOMY

**Abstract:** The text presents Solčavsko area through perspective of the Integral Green Economy conceptualisation. It is framed into its developmental path and identification of the key elements of its sustainability. The national project of study circles is considered a useful initiative in this frame. Interpretation of Solčavsko development is given on the basis of sustainability analysis and oriented into the future Integral Green Economy.

**Keywords:** Solčavsko, Slovenia, local development, sustainability, Integral Green Economy

### Introduction

The Slovenian story of Integral Renewal consists of a multitude of stories, of several bigger and smaller stories. One of them appears to be a network of study circles, offered by Slovenian state/government in the frame of adult education since independence. Their aim has changed from initial accent on democratisation to the recent local development focus. Rural areas thus get a rare opportunity of self-organised learning which – by definition – has to end with a local event or issue. Considerable contribution of study circles to several local environments is regularly recognised on the local and the state levels, occasionally also in the frame of European Union. Slovenian study circles are interpreted as a first phase of development, where motivation and a common goal development are very important. Information on study circles as a lever of local development has been published recently (Bogataj et. al, 2013, Gobbo, Bogataj, 2014) and is available at <http://sk.acs.si>. However the accent in the frame of integral green is on the case Solčavsko. Its practice of local development started long ago, as this is a medieval settlement with particular historical path of development. Situated along the state border, distant from large urban areas but recently well connected with their population, it enables particular lesson from the perspective of integral green development. Relatively small municipality, described later on, is linked with study circles in the functional way. Therefore sustainable developmental practice and vision is of particular interest from the perspective of culture based economy, which consider tradition an essential pillar of development.

## Solčavsko presentation

Solčavsko Region is located at the upper current of the Savinja River along the Slovenian - Austrian border. The area is surrounded by mountain chains of Kamnik-Savinja Alps and Karavanks. Solčavsko consists of three Alpine glacial valleys: Logarska dolina, Robanov kot and Matkov kot. In the middle of the area lies Solčava with some dozens of inhabitants while the whole municipality only count up to 600. The area is 103 square kilometres large, so an average population density is only 5 inhabitants per square kilometre. More than 80% of the area is under protection of Parks or European Network NATURA 2000.

For centuries, large farms have existed here, the largest in the whole Alpine area. Since ever they were more or less self-sufficient. But Solčavsko is also characterised by its centre - Solčava and eco-tourism. There are (intentionally) no large ski-lifts but traditional activities: agriculture, forestry and handicraft. Mentality of resolute and persistent locals is therefore particular and community is at the same time cohesive and open. The proof is that annually more than 100.000 visitors come. They argue their visit with the natural beauty, recreation opportunities and facilities excellency.

Milestones of sustainable development start at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century (breeding of indigenous Jezersko-Solčavska sheep breed and has led to the local initiative of Robanov kot natural value protection (1950). Some later, in 1987 Landscape Parks Logarska dolina and Robanov kot were established and concession for Nature Park management in Logarska dolina (1992) has been gained as the first example in Slovenia.

Study Circles at the Panoramic Road in 2004 started to focus on learning for tourism development in the frame of protection of natural and cultural heritage. They have developed and edited promotion materials, local dictionary, typical food etc. Study circles proved to be not only an investment into internal cohesion through dialogue based learning, but also stimulation of targeted activities, provided to municipality as project ideas. Soon the international environment recognised the efforts of Solčavsko:

- CIPRA International awarded the management of Nature Park Logarska dolina in 2005,
- European Commission entitled Solčavsko European Destination of Excellence in 2009;
- the multipurpose centre for sustainable development Center Rinka in 2011, established by grants was awarded by architecture and operation Golden Pencil (2011), Plečnik's Medal (2012), 3<sup>th</sup> Award in competition Constructive Alps (2013).
- The 'Golden Stone' Award celebrated the development of the Municipality of Solčava (2012).

## Sustainability accents

However, it is worth to mention that Solčavsko is an extremely heterogeneous region. Some people live on farms high up in the mountains. Others cope with conditions in alpine valleys, like Robanov kot, Logarska dolina and Matkov kot. Central settlement of Solčava is of course different from valleys and sole farms, so municipality and Region have to cope with the diversity of developmental models.

Sustainability perspective has been strengthened by two particular specifics: 1. internal innovative potential and 2. external expert support. Both specifics are regarded crucial and were empowered by their direct link and constant dialogical exchange. The first one, innovative potential is understood under the name of local inhabitant, Avgust Lenar. He provided a new governance model. His slogan "*Logarska dolina is not here to be changed, but to change you.*" characterises high confidence into own strengths of Solčavsko. A forester by profession but for decades their Landscape Park manager describes developmental path this way:

*"In the 80s of the 20th century, farmers in Logarska dolina had several problems with many careless visitors parking in a natural environment, setting up fires, littering and causing damage to the environment and locals in different ways. In 1987, the municipality created a Landscape Park. However, there was no control services and money for development. Therefore, the land owners established a company in 1992 and obtained a concession for the Park management. They started to collect the entrance fee for motor vehicles. It was the first such example in Slovenia, locals managing the park, which caused disapproval from the visitors and the professional community. But the awards and a wide recognition for the successful management of the protected area soon confirmed that the decisions of the locals had been correct"*

The second specific was external expert support bringing a broader understanding of protected areas. "*For the last two or three generations, the locals of Solčavsko have seen their chance to survive and their future in self-sufficient farming, market-oriented livestock production, income from the forest, mass tourism, ecotourism ... The whole future development should be seen as a collection of the best of what each of the above activities has to offer. Finding the future will not be oriented towards finding a single "ideal" activity, but towards finding a harmonious coexistence of all of these activities*

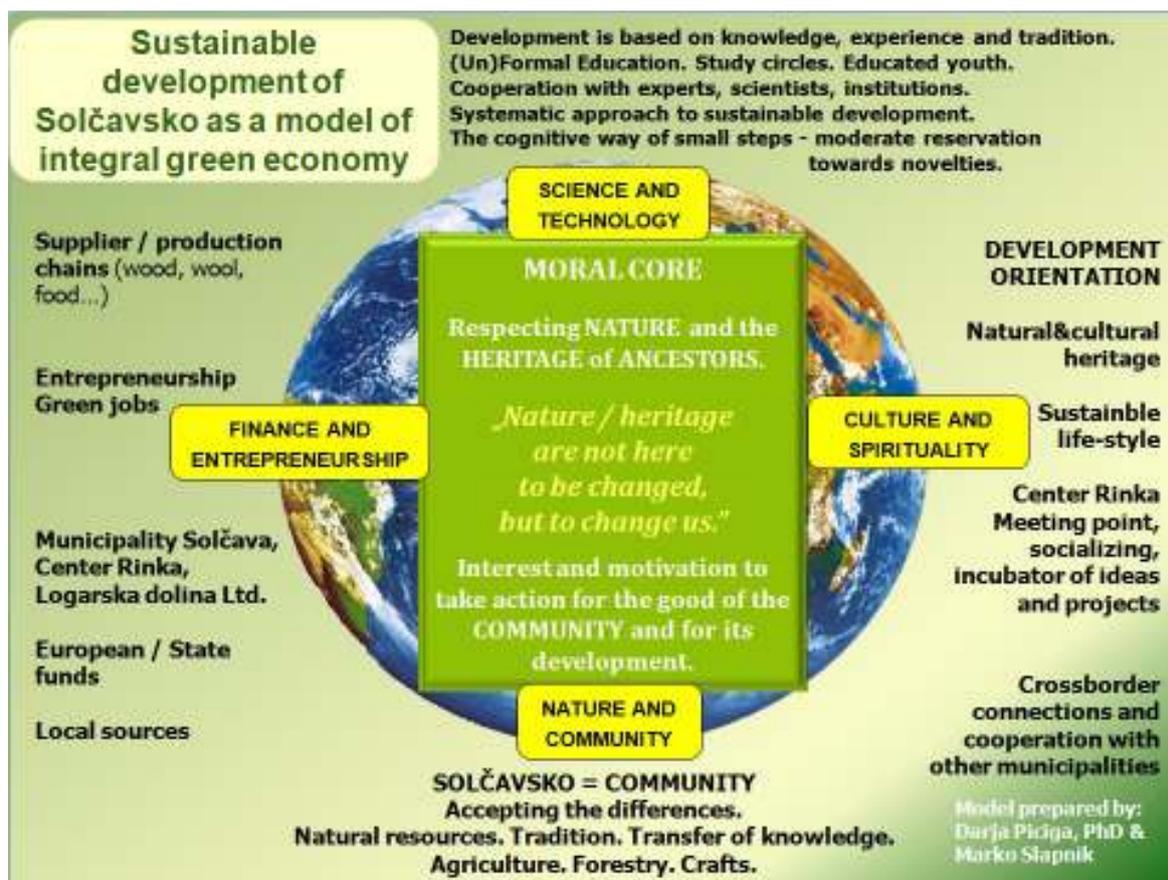
*(which are part of Solčavsko identity) – and some more - on the basis of sustainable thinking. Stability and strength of Highland people and their farms lies in their conservatism, and their mistrust towards novelties which leave little room for manoeuvre for correcting mistakes in unfavourable natural conditions” (Anko et al., 2007)*

## **Study circles**

Common goals and seeking development opportunities are a constant challenge of any distant entity. Solčavsko started to test study circles in 2004 as their functioning is laid down on the same principles. Their first study circle was provided in the upper area of the valley, to scattered farms along Panorama road, aimed at preservation, revival and development of the natural, cultural and ethnological heritage of the area. Following its positive experience and outcomes, several other study circles developed later with a clear purpose and creative energy among people, who up to then did not attribute their time to evolution of the common goal. The results were inspiring. An NGO, called Society for the development and conservation of natural and cultural heritage Panorama was established. It carried out a project *Preserving the heritage at Solčavsko Panoramic Road* already in its first year and got Ford Fund award for its outcomes. Its mentor, later elected mayor of Solčavsko, continued to use the principles and methodology of study circles. He emphasised listening as the basis of co-operation and intergenerational flow. The main result of municipality activity was establishment of the public institution, Center Rinka aimed to manage visitors and introduce them into sustainable management built under a Norwegian Grant in 2011. It continues promotion of local materials - *wood-, wool- and food -*, local people, their skills and knowledge through Tourist Information Point, a multimedia hall, permanent and temporary exhibitions, and selling space for local products. The tiniest photo there up to the largest patchwork, has its own story and is related to other things and people. Building a real creative community with a clear development vision is not an easy task. Last period is particularly characterised with “green jobs” creation.

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The moral core of the case is given by its respect of the nature and heritage. It develops due to motivation to take action for the common good (instead individual good). Incorporation of specific and expert knowledge seems to be of particular importance, but also characteristic of the past (e.g. Macesnik farm), recent history (Park establishment by Mr. Lenar) and actual leading teams (e.g. municipality, Center Rinka). The picture 1 therefore logically integrates dimensions represented in the integral green conceptualisation, adjusted to the Solčavsko situation. Responsibility to the local resources and community is one of the main characteristics, here poorly documented with developmental opportunities refused (e.g. an offer of trading centre establishment, weekend area interest etc.). Only local people know the difficulties of the balance between rising expectations and limited opportunities. But up to now they succeeded to continue tradition which proved to be responsible and have provided resources also for the present (and future) generations.



Picture 1: Solčavsko in the frame of integral green concept

Small and moderate steps of innovation, education and also research (see Anko et. al, 2007) provide continuation and materialisation of the moral core and accommodation to a sustainable life style for those who are willing to follow Solčavsko model. Respect of nature and tradition, care for the knowledge transfer on the basis of added value to supply chain (wood, wool and food) in terms of entrepreneurship is geared towards creating green jobs. However, external project resources and institutional cooperation must continue and provide resources to keep young families resistant to pushing and pulling initiatives which damage community and its tradition.

## Literature

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