

## GARDEN VILLAGE BLEED GLAMPING KOT INOVATIVNA REVITALIZACIJA DEGRADIRANE KRAJINE

### GARDEN VILLAGE BLEED GLAMPING AS AN INNOVATIVE REVITALIZATION OF DEGRADED LANDSCAPE

#### Ključne besede

glamping; Garden Village Bled; revitalizacija; ekološki turizem; sonaravno

#### Key words

glamping; Garden Village Bled; revitalization; ecological tourism; sustainable

#### Izvleček

V članku želimo prikazati značilnosti glampinga, ki v zadnjem času tudi v Sloveniji pridobiva na prepoznavnosti ter se pri kratki raziskavi tematike naslonimo na lastne ugotovitve skozi delo na realnih glamping projektih (kot npr. Garden Village Bled v Sloveniji), na tuje primere dobre prakse (iz Avstralije (The Longitude 131° resort), Afrike (Nomad Tanzania) in Kanade (The Clayoquot Wilderness Resort)) ter na redko literaturo, ki tovrstno tematiko obravnava. Predstavljene so nekatere glavne značilnosti glamping letovišč, kot so ekološko, edukativno in kulturno naravnost panoge, ki skozi svoje delovanje povezuje lokalno prebivalstvo in izročilo (primeri aktivnega povezovanja in edukacije o aboridžinski kulturi v Avstraliji, izobraževanja lokalnega prebivalstva in gostov o vrednostih in pomenu ohranitve divjih vrst v Afriki ter vključevanja indijanskih plemen v delovanje letovišča v Kanadi) s trajnostnim turizmom. Nekateri glavni problemi pri raziskovanju glampinga, ki jih članek oriše so: pomanjkanje relevantnih raziskav in literature ter negativni prizvok, ki ga ima glamping v Sloveniji in po svetu, kar verjetno pripomore tudi k slabi raziskanosti pozitivnih učinkov glampinga kot nove, nišne panoge v turizmu.

#### Abstract

The paper aims to show the characteristics of glamping, which is only recently gaining more recognition also in Slovenia. The short survey leans on our own findings through our work on real projects (such as Garden Village Bled glamping resort in Slovenia), on foreign examples of good practice (from Australia (The Longitude 131° resort), Africa (The Longitude 131° resort) and Canada (The Clayoquot Wilderness Resort)) and rare literature that researches glamping. Some of the main characteristics of glamping are presented, such as ecological, educational and cultural nature of the sector, which through its activities connects local population and traditions (for example active integration of and education about Aboriginal culture in Australia, the education of local people and visitors about the value and importance of preserving wildlife in Africa and the integration of Native Indian tribes in Canada) with sustainable tourism. Some of the main issues in the research that the article outlines are: the lack of relevant research and literature as well as negative connotation that is connected with glamping in Slovenia and abroad, which probably contributes to the poor research on the positive effects of glamping as a new niche sector in tourism.

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## 1. Introduction

The paper focuses on glamping as a niche sector in (ecological) tourism through examples of good practice from Slovenia (a revitalization of a neglected site, a former plant nursery of Vila Bled into glamping resort Garden Village Bled) and abroad (Africa, Australia and Canada). Glamping as a new trend in tourism is rather unexplored in academic literature and so an appropriate topic for this short study. Garden Village Bled [Garden] presented in the paper, set a new course of tourism development in Slovenia, in an already established tourist destination - town of Bled, when it opened in 2014. Bled is known for its recognisable vistas - the castle on the hill, the church on an island in the middle of the Lake, etc., but lacks innovative tourist experiences, services and products. The project, an innovative revitalization, focusing on sustainability and luxury at the same time, was carried out mostly on site by local craftsmen, knowledge and materials. The design of the resort was based on local architectural heritage and prioritised minimising the cost following a low-tech design approach. The revitalization of the site answered the questions of sustainable yet luxury tourism and catered to the requirements of the client, the project scope and budget and the characteristics of the site. The glamping project has been successful since its opening in June 2014 and recognisable abroad and in Slovenia,

published in major newspapers and shared on social media and blogs. The project Garden Village Bled and its creators (designers Borut and Barbara Kokelj and architects Gregor Vreš, Tina Demšar Vreš, Miloš Jeftič) are also recipients of several awards at the national level, such as the Green pencil in 2015 (given by the Chamber of architecture and spatial planning of Slovenia), Snovalec award in 2014 and Sejalec award in 2015, which are given to the most innovative tourism products from 2004 (by the Slovenian Tourist Board) and as such an appropriate example of good practice for this paper.

## 2. Research problems and aims

Main focus of the article is set on the following issues:

- the slightly negative connotation of glamping in Slovenia [Sajovic, 2014],
- characteristics of glamping that go beyond luxury ('high price labelling') and
- glamping as an innovative niche in tourism industry.

These topics are discussed through selected foreign examples of good practice, such as the Clayoquot Wilderness Resort (Canada) and the Longitude 131° resort (Africa) and the implemented project of Garden Village Bled (Slovenia). The subject of glamping as a possible innovative revitalization tool and ecological tourism development theme is observed through the few



Slika 1: Garden Village Bled – Vrtna vas Bled, glamping letovišče na območju nekdanje, zapuščene vrtnarije Vile Bled.

Figure 1: Garden Village Bled, glamping resort build on the remains of former plant nursery of Vila Bled.

published papers on the subject, foreign examples of three selected resorts that work with local cultures to sustainably develop natural and cultural surroundings (such as Clayoquot Wilderness Resort, Longitude 131° resort and Nomad Tanzania) and more so through the observations and hands-on experiences gained in creating and implementing the Garden Village Bled glamping project in Slovenia. Since there is a lack of academic research papers on the topic of glamping, the paper acknowledges the limitations of this short study, while hoping to open new questions about this interesting and new niche sector that successfully merges (natural and cultural) heritage, modern design, local architecture and tourism.

### 3. The characteristics of glamping

The knowledge about glamping is, as Sakáčová [2013, I] describes, restricted to a short explanation as luxury camping or glamorous, upscale camping [Conlin, 2012]. The main idea behind glamping is to bond with nature without having to sacrifice the luxury of a home or a hotel, but when researching the topic further, glamping consists of several other important themes, not just that of luxury and high price as perceived in the public [Sajovic, 2014]. Sakáčová [2013] describes that the main motivations for glamping vary: to experience the environment, escapism, rest and relaxation, recreation and bonding (of families or romantic couples), etc. Glamping is usually set in nature of significant value, such as is the

case of the Longitude 131° resort in the wilderness of Australia, set in the Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. The resort connects visitors with the rich aboriginal culture of the region. The Longitude 131° resort is nestled in a World Heritage listed cultural landscape, most known for its iconic red monoliths, the sacred red domes of Uluru and Kata Tjuta [Longitude]. Another example of a resort that is strongly connected with the natural and cultural surroundings in which it resides, is the Clayoquot Wilderness Resort in remote Canadian wilderness outside Vancouver. The resort, according to their web site, has spent millions of dollars rehabilitating miles of salmon spawning grounds in partnership with the native Ahousaht people through the Environmental Legacy Program that provides economic development in the local community [Clayoquot].

What is also interesting in researching these and other examples (Nomad Tanzania, Garden Village Bled) is the socializing aspect of glamping—the 'get to know the local people, food and culture' aspect while also emphasizing the privacy that glamping offers and that glampers expect. This is recognised for example in the philosophy of Nomad Tanzania - life, love & the pursuit of wilderness. The Nomad Tanzania is a 20 years old East African Company that manages small safari camps in three of the remotest corners of Tanzania. The company, since its inception, invests in local communities and individual people through micro-finance loans for starting small businesses, through training of new local

Slika 2: Pogled na letovišče Longitude 131° razkrije njegovo umestitev v izjemno kulturno krajino, puščavsko okolje narodnega parka Uluru-Kata Tjuta, s pogledom na svetovno znano skalno formacijo Uluru (Ayers Rock) v ozadju.  
Figure 2: The view over the Longitude 131° resort reveals its placement in the spectacular cultural landscape, the desert environment of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, with the famous monoliths Uluru (Ayers Rock) in the background [source: <http://longitude131.com.au/>; <http://vintage.johnnyjet.com/folder/archive/WheresJohnny052420062.html>].





guides, employment opportunities and education (through the Nomad Trust) and through special attention and investments being forwarded to conservation of nature and wildlife. The camps (ten camps in Northern, Western and Southern Tanzania) move with the migrating routes of the herds that live in the National parks (the Serengeti National Park, Tarangire National Park, etc.). Guests (also glampers - the word glamper is derived from glamping) can also contribute and support the locals directly through funding of meals in schools, teacher's salaries, building classrooms and Save the elephant's project that is coordinated with the Frankfurt Zoo and the government of Tanzania [Nomad].

Different factors described above and below (such as the synergy between the local population and glamping projects, sustainable and eco-friendly design solutions, local heritage integration, recognition and education, etc.) should represent the base for developing future glamping projects that could be integrated in the local communities and as such be successful in the long-term. Sakáčová [2013] describes, that it is possible to distinguish between two groups of glampers— resort glampers and caravan glampers and that glamping resorts should be designed accordingly. Both groups of glampers though wish to be close to nature but do not want to give up the comforts, seek relaxation but also adventurous outdoor activities. Other push factors in glamping, as Sakáčová [2013] describes, are:

- closeness to nature,
- resorts often set in extraordinary landscapes,
- luxury, high quality services and comfort,
- unique activities and recreation.

To the before mentioned, we could, on the basis of selected examples of good practice and our own experiences (gained through the Garden Village Bled glamping, Ljubno Herbal glamping for Charming Slovenia brand and the latest glamping product for Adria, with Glampro – the first Boutique Mobile Tent), add the following:

- connecting the tourists with local people, heritage and nature,
- high quality recreational, health and spa services,
- high quality gastronomy,
- eco-friendly philosophy (self-grown food, re-used materials, eco-toilets, natural swimming pools, separation of garbage, ecological means of transportation, etc.),
- recognisable, locally inspired modern design and architecture,
- family-friendly,
- privacy.

Through synergy of glamping (tourist development) with the local environment, glamping projects can play an important role in revitalizing and developing new tourist destination in a more sustainable manner than for example large scale, enclosed and alienated

Slika 3: Pogled na eko-safari letovišče Clayoquot Wilderness Resort v Kanadi, kamor gostje prispejo z zasebnim letalom ali čolnom, je odprto od maja do septembra in nudi pristno izkušnjo narave vsem starostnim skupinam pod vodstvom lokalnega indijanskega plemena Ahousht First Nation.

Figure 3: The view of the eco-safari Clayoquot Wilderness Resort in Canada, where guests arrive by the private plane or boat, is open from May to September and offers a genuine experience of nature for all age groups, led by local Indian tribe Ahousht First Nation [source: <http://www.wildretreat.com/>].



hotel developments. The following chapter observes Garden Village Bled through described factors in glamping tourism.

#### 4. The characteristics of Garden Village Bled resort development

The site and the Garden Village Bled glamping resort are in private ownership. The project started in 2013, with investor Borut Kelih and graphic designer Borut Kokelj meeting on site of a former plant nursery that was too small to be profitable in the future. The site did not have open views towards the lake Bled and was nestled between the single-family homes and small apartment buildings. Lack of 'extraordinary landscape' meant that the design had to look for inspiration from within and create its own identity. Landscape d.o.o. team- Gregor Vreš and Tina Demšar Vreš was invited to design the project with Borut and Barbara Kokelj and the idea of a Garden Village was carried out through the entire design and construction process. The program of the former nursery was a starting point for the glamping resort design - the idea of a secret garden was developed, a self-grown food spot where the visitors could pick fruits and vegetables, go fishing and prepare the food themselves. The location was problematic, since the site consisted of two very different characters, one gently sloping and open, the other forested and dropping some 20 meters down towards the existing stream Jezernica. At the same time, the dual character of the site was the inspiration for the design of the resort. On one side there will

be sunny, open and highly 'cultivated' terraced fruit and vegetable gardens, with tents and natural swimming pool. The opposite - the cool, dark and wild forest landscape will hide the wooden treehouses and the small tents by the stream, floating over a small pond where guests could catch trout's straight out of bed. The upper part of the site offered enough space for the placement of large glamping tents suitable for families. The tents were settled in lush vegetable and fruit gardens, each with its own wooden hot tub and large terraces. The existing building structures were renovated by architect Miloš Jeftič. Natural swimming pool with infinity edge, stream running through and a small children's playground were designed along with glasshouses in which food grows for the guests to enjoy. In 'the forest', on the steep slopes towards the stream, treehouses were designed, high above in the treetops, constructed on site in local larch wood and by local craftsmen, who actively contributed to the design details, like the wooden lock and key, originating from the shepherds huts in the surrounding hills.

An outdoor spa area consists of a sauna, massage and Kneipp area, a natural stream with pebble beach and yoga and meditation areas. The resort, especially the forested part, leaves nature free with all the new construction raised from the ground. This decision created the space and the opportunity for nature to reclaim and revitalise the degraded landscape. The main building material of the resort was (larch) wood, locally sourced and treated without chemicals, with natural



Slika 4: Glamping Nomad Tanzanija Serengeti Safari camp v Afriki, ki sledi migracijam čred divjih živali v parku Serengeti.

Figure 4: Glamping Nomad Tanzania Serengeti Safari camp in Africa, that follows the migrations of herds in the Serengeti park [source: <http://www.wildretreat.com/>].





Slika 5: Različni značaji Garden Village Bled glamping letovišča.  
Figure 5: The different characters of Garden Village Bled glamping resort.

oils or left to age naturally. Resorts own water borehole provides fresh and pure drinking water, which is heated with biomass and used for the entire resort, the hot tubs and the natural swimming pool. Natural swimming pool design and technical solution follows the certified Biotop GmbH system [Biotop] and was the first semi-public (open for guests of the resort) natural swimming pool in Slovenia. The process of design and construction of the Garden Village Bled represents a holistic working approach, one that intertwined investor, designers, architects, contractors and managers of the resort after the construction. The before mentioned factors that influence the decision on where and how to travel, were taken into consideration. The design focused on creating a complex, sustainable, ecological and recognizable 'tourist product' that would be able to compete in an already saturated world of tourism and would be able to attract visitors from around the world, which was done successfully.

## 5. Discussion

The slightly negative connotation of glamping in Slovenia [Sajovic, 2014] is contradicted with the recognised characteristics of glamping in this short study. The paper opens new questions on the subject of glamping, such as the diversity of glampers and lack of thorough research and it reveals some truly interesting projects in tourism from around the world. Selected glamping resorts from Australia (The Longitude 131° resort), Africa (Nomad Tanzania), Canada (The Clayoquot Wilderness Resort) and Slovenia (The Garden Village Bled resort) show that glamping offers a way of creating ecological, educational and cultural tourism destinations that go beyond merely 'luxury' and that they can successfully provide a platform for innovative and sustainable regional and local development. Certain factors and characteristics of successful glamping projects were recognised through working on real life projects (in our case - Garden Village Bled and Ljubno Herbal glamping resort for Charming Slovenia brand) and from researched foreign examples of good practice. The relationship between the

local community, the natural and/or cultural heritage of the region, strong ecology and sustainability character and program, privacy and unique products and services could present a base for an in-depth study of this new niche in tourism, which is gaining more and more recognition in Slovenia as well.

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