

Imaginaries and Rhythms of Remoteness: The Case of Bohinj as a Tourist Destination



Imaginariji in ritmi odročnosti:
primer Bohinja kot turistične destinacije

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ABSTRACT

This article presents an examination of the mutually constitutive relationship between remoteness and connectivity in the alpine tourist destination of Bohinj in Slovenia. Building upon existing ethnographic explorations of remoteness and tourism imaginaries, the author explores how the alpine locality of Bohinj has been continually made and remade as an out-of-the-way tourist destination and how the imaginary of remoteness presents itself in everyday life, which is analysed through the lens of tourism seasonality.

KEYWORDS: remoteness, anthropology of tourism, tourism imaginaries, seasonality, rhythms, Bohinj, Slovenia

IZVLEČEK

V članku avtorica raziskuje vzajemno konstitutivno razmerje med odročnostjo in povezanostjo v alpski turistični destinaciji Bohinj v Sloveniji. Na podlagi etnografskih raziskav odmaknjenosti in turističnih imaginarijev avtorica preučuje, kako se Bohinj nenehno ustvarja in preoblikuje kot odročna turistična destinacija in kako se imaginarij odročnosti predstavlja v vsakdanjem življenju, analiziranjem skozi prizmo turistične sezone.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: odročnost, antropologija turizma, turistični imaginariji, sezone, ritmi, Bohinj, Slovenija

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Tourism has long been an economic strategy to encourage development. However, the potentially negative effects of tourism – due to mass tourism or, more recently, over-tourism – have rendered it a contested practice.¹ Numerous problems have been highlighted in policy discussions and academic debates, with the first academic critiques of tourism emerging as early as the 1970s (Nash 1977; Turner and Ash 1975). The inherently translocal dimensions of tourism render tourist destinations highly dependent on broader trends in a global industry as well as on other factors often outside their realm of control. Challenges such as climate change highlight not only the scale of factors that shape tourism but also its potential environmental impact, the diminishment of which would require the modification or even curtailing of tourism.

Despite the numerous questions and potential problems linked to tourism, it is still considered a viable option for peripheral, rural, or less-developed places worldwide that otherwise have few other developmental options – including numerous localities throughout the Alps, including the Slovenian Alps. Such a strategy is also encouraged by the images and imaginaries that underpin the tourism industry in the form of desirable tourist destinations intended to respond to the preferences or wishes of tourists. Yet, what happens to peripheral, out-of-the-way places when they become tourist destinations, given that their success depends on the number of tourists that travel to visit them? What happens to the remoteness of a place when its well-being and development hinge on an economic strategy that seems to undermine it?

In this article, I examine the mutually constitutive relationship between remoteness (or insularity) and connectivity in the alpine tourist destination of Bohinj in Slovenia. My ethnographic analysis builds primarily on existing academic discussions on tourism imaginaries, remoteness, and seasonality as a form of temporal rhythm. With the aid of archival/media research and ethnographic fieldwork,² I explore how the alpine locality of Bohinj in Slovenia became depicted as an isolated, out-of-the-way tourist destination and how the imaginary of remoteness presents itself in everyday life. Finally, I analyse the challenges that residents identify as resulting from Bohinj's success as a remote tourist destination.

In this manner, I focus on Bohinj as a remote alpine tourist destination and the impact of imaginaries of remoteness on everyday life and local experiences of place. Analysing how the notion of Bohinj as a remote, faraway tourist destination informs everyday life is inher-

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There are numerous debates and lines of inquiry linked to the concept of over-tourism, which transcend the analytical discussion presented in this article. For a critical overview of over-tourism, see O'Regan et al. 2022.

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This article is based on research conducted for the Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia research project (J6-4610) (Podjed and Peternel 2024) and the Ethnological, Anthropological and Folklore Studies Research on Everyday Life research programme (P6-0088). My analysis is also informed by numerous previous periods of ethnographic research conducted in Bohinj in connection to tourism and development: 2001–2003 (Tourism and Globalization – L6-3095), 2011–2014 (Triglav National Park: Heritages, Actors – Strategies, Questions, and Solutions – J6-4210), and 2015–2017 (Park and Enjoy Nature! Norway and EEA Grants 2009–2014).

ently linked to the temporal or seasonal dimensions of tourism. Given Bohinj's contours and features as a tourist destination, it is virtually overrun with tourists during certain periods of the year – particularly the summer months that comprise the high season. The large number of tourists that flock to Bohinj during the summer seems to subvert its image as a peaceful, remote alpine basin, which begs the question of whether one could consider such a locality to be remote. However, tourism in Bohinj manifests itself in an intermittent fashion, resulting in seasons of saturation interspersed with periods of relative isolation or remoteness.

Thus, the following discussion delves into the relationship between remoteness and connectivity by exploring the interplay between imaginaries and experiences of remoteness or isolation, particularly from the perspective of the local residents and tourism actors in Bohinj. It is based on ethnographic research into the rhythmic or seasonal nature of tourism that centres on two main issues: the shifting rhythms of seasonal tourism practice and actors' experiences of tourism seasonality.

PRODUCTIONS OF REMOTENESS

Tourism literature, including the anthropology of tourism, abounds with research into the images, imagery, and imaginaries of tourism – lines of inquiry that initially stemmed from explorations of the cultural impact of a practice that, as James Lett noted, is “the single largest peaceful movement of persons across cultural boundaries in the history of the world” (Lett 1989: 275). An enduring interest in exploring the cultural dimensions of the interactions between tourism's hosts and guests has informed numerous studies of the visual and cultural representations of all that is meant to be seen by what John Urry famously termed “the tourist gaze” (Urry 1990). Research critically engaging with tourism as a culturally powerful practice examined these visual and cultural representations with attention to the inherently unequal relationship between so-called hosts and guests (Smith 1989) as well as the nature of tourism as a presumably superficial practice strongly prone to commoditisation, often resulting in adaptations of local traditions and features to match tourist expectations (e.g. Greenwood 1989). Other studies in this vein have considered the tourist gaze as potentially operating as a mirror both for tourists as well as the people that tourists gaze upon. In this light, tourism not only has the potential to negatively impact host cultures but can also serve as an “empowering vehicle of self-representation” (Stronza 2001: 271), which facilitates the purposeful reinvention, reinforcement, or recreation of elements of identity (Nuñez 1964; Van Den Berghe 1994) – as well as their visual representations.

More recent research on images in tourism has highlighted the crucial role that images play in the production of tourist destinations and as a central component of tourism as a global industry that hinges on well-established, seductive images and discourses that encourage tourism travel. Together with other elements such as myths (Selwyn 1996) and meta-narratives (Bruner 2005), images are also an integral part of tourism imaginaries, understood as “representational assemblages that interact with people's personal imaginings and are used as mean-making and world-shaping devices” (Salazar 2012: 864). While

existing studies of tourism imaginaries are, as Naomi Leite argues, highly varied in terms of definition and approach (Leite 2014), they do, however, share an interest in examining how tourism images and imagery operate within broader systems of tourism meaning-making at all levels. Studying images (as well as other meaning-making elements such as stories or discourses) within the context of imaginaries involves exploring the power of varied, often mass-mediated master narratives or tropes in terms of which groups of tourism actors engage with tourism as a key element of the so-called experience economy (Löfgren 2005). Tourism imaginaries can operate as a source of inspiration for tourist expectations and experiences as well as for producing and circulating convincing formulations of inviting and distinctive tourist destinations. At the same time, all groups of tourism actors – be they local tourist actors or residents, tourist industry actors, or tourists themselves – help generate, maintain, mediate, alter, or consume tourism imaginaries (Salazar 2012).

Building upon these discussions, the following analysis centres on ethnographically exploring the imaginary of remoteness as an important element of Bohinj's self-image as a tourist destination – and examining its culturally specific contours mapped out by residents and local tourism actors. The tourism industry abounds with diverse imaginaries of tourist destinations cast as different, other, and remote – be it geographically or relationally. Remoteness or isolation is often recast in many tourist destinations portrayed as ideal places to “get away from it all”. These formulations can be based on insularity (Oroz 2022; Simonič 2017, 2024), peripherality (Kozorog 2013), or even notions of paradise (Kravanja 2012; Salazar 2010).

The conscious casting of tourist destinations as remote or peripheral locations in order to inscribe them with added value or distinction is but one dimension of a distinctive phenomenon of contemporary life: the persistence of remoteness – at the level of lived experience as well as in the form of a compelling imaginary. Remoteness seems to endure despite our world being continually reshaped by increasing levels of connection. Existing forms of transportation and communication link together the far corners of the world – to say nothing of how digital connections transcend physical distances. Numerous analysts have explored the persistence of remoteness, both conceptually/analytically and ethnographically. Many have revisited the work of Edwin Ardener (2012), who expounded on remoteness in both spatial and social terms. He posited that remoteness should not be understood only in terms of topographical space, as a geographical given resulting from physical distance or geological features or barriers (i.e. mountains, oceans) that shape the contours of the material spaces between places. Instead, he also called for exploring remoteness in terms of topological space, in terms of differing degrees of connection and distancing between places. In a similar vein, Harms et al. highlight the fact that remoteness is not so much a state as a positioning; it is “not simply a static condition found somewhere *out there* beyond the pale; rather it is always being made, unmade, and transformed” (Harms et al. 2014: 362). Thus, remoteness is the result of numerous processes that define the relative positioning of a place in terms of gradations of connectivity – primarily from places depicted as (relative) centres. Examining the remoteness of a given place thus involves exploring its processual nature, identifying “the

ways that it is actively made and remade across political, material, and historical scales” (Saxer and Andersson 2019: 143) through diverse practices of distancing or connection enacted by a range of social actors, groups, institutions, and state/government bodies.

Inspired by these lines of inquiry, the following ethnographic study centres on exploring the processes that make and unmake remoteness in Bohinj as a means of decentring the notion of remoteness as a static condition. This involves tracing the varied, potentially contested processes across diverse scales while attending to the infrastructural and topographical materialities that help shape it (e.g. Gohain 2019; Perinić Lewis 2024). Many of these processes are shaped or maintained by political, economic, or institutional centres – thus transcending the local level. However, not all such practices that contribute to the making of remote places are trans-local; remoteness can also be consciously produced and even promoted locally, as there can be certain local benefits or returns from remoteness – be they political, social, or economic. Phillip Vannini (2012) coined the term “remove” to refer to the performance of distancing as a mechanism of (relative) insulation used to attain certain benefits of remoteness. Ethnographers have depicted how local actors in remote places employ distancing as a tool for varied social and political ends, while others move to remote regions to actively pursue the benefits of life in isolated places (e.g. Caballero 2023; Gibson, Luckman and Willoughby-Smith 2010; Ledinek Lozej 2024; Ortar and Filipo 2023; Polajnar Horvat 2024; Schweitzer and Povoroznyuk 2019). Others have demonstrated that a locality’s remoteness can be recast as a resource for promoting it as a tourist destination (Jørgensen 2011; Lou, Oaks and Shein 2019). The processes shaping a place’s remoteness – which does not necessarily overlap with its relative position in geographical terms – thus manifest the diverse, often divergent experiences, perceptions, and agendas of varied social actors participating in them (Vannini 2023).

With the aid of archival and media research, as well as interviews with Bohinj residents and tourism actors conducted in the winter and spring of 2024, I track the processes shaping Bohinj’s remoteness over time, particularly as an important element of its tourism imaginary. In addition, I explore the relationship between the imaginaries and experiences of remoteness by examining how actors in Bohinj experience tourism at the level of everyday life and their experiences of place. In doing so, I focus primarily on the intermittence of tourism in Bohinj, which manifests itself primarily in terms of seasonality.

In tourism literature, seasonality is considered to be one of tourism’s distinctive yet problematic features, defined most often as a “temporal imbalance in the phenomenon of tourism which may be expressed in terms of such elements as numbers of visitors, expenditure of visitors, traffic on highways and other forms of transportation, employment, and admission to attractions” (Butler 2001: 5). The prevalent approach within mainstream tourism literature focuses on the challenges or problems that seasonality creates for the industry (Baum and Lundtrop 2001), which in turn shape the impact seasonality has on the people and places that depend on tourism (Cannas 2012; Koenig-Lewis and Bischoff 2005), particularly in remote places (e.g. Baum and Hagen 1999; Commons and Page 2001). Other lines of inquiry examine the sustainability of tourism seasonality and the challenges of inte-

grating tourism with other livelihood strategies by focusing on tourism's temporal rhythms (e.g. Rongna and Sun 2019).

Expanding on the focus on the processual nature of the spatial production of the remoteness of tourist destinations, this study's approach to examining tourism seasonality builds on existing research on the temporal dimension of the production of tourist destinations. More specifically, it centres on existing analyses of rhythm as an element of temporality, which is understood as the social, lived experience of time (Edensor 2010). Tom Mels' argument that "human beings have always been rhythm-makers as much as place-makers" (Mels 2004: 3) highlights the extent to which the spatial and temporal dimensions of place-making processes are intertwined. As Henri Lefebvre argues in his seminal work *Rhythmanalysis*, "everywhere where there is an interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is rhythm" (Lefebvre 2004: 15). Tourism practices "replete with temporal structures, phases and paces at a range of scales" (Edensor 2011: 54) manifest themselves as tourism seasonality in places that are being continually shaped by a complex mix of rhythms that emerge from a range of human practices. In this light, tourist destinations can thus be examined as sites where a complex array of rhythms – be they daily, weekly, or yearly, mechanical, natural or social/institutional, cyclical or unilinear – overlap, intersect, harmonise or clash at the level of everyday life (e.g. Conlon 2010; Kaaristo 2020; Vannini 2012). The rhythms that help produce, mark, or frame tourism practice include seasonal-climatic rhythms (i.e. spring-summer-autumn-winter seasons, rainy-dry seasons), institutional rhythms (holidays, festivals, hours of commerce), as well as the rhythms of tourist activities (timing/duration of tourist packages, operating schedules of tourist attractions/activities). Of particular importance are also the rhythms of mobility (Vannini 2023), including the schedule, duration, and pacing of different transport modalities – both local and translocal.

In tourist destinations, tourist rhythms overlap, synchronise, or clash with the other rhythmic practices carried out by local inhabitants and other actors (Čuka and Oroz 2024; Edensor 2011), who also inscribe meaning and significance to the existing rhythms and dynamics of their interplay. Building on research in this vein, the study centres on analysing the rhythms in terms of which interlocutors talk about tourism seasonality in Bohinj as well as the interplay between these rhythmic practices and others that underpin their experiences of place and remoteness.

IMAGINARIES OF REMOTENESS AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM

The inherently relational and dynamic nature of remoteness implies that the criteria for categorising a place as remote may shift over time – and depend on perspective. For example, the history of Bohinj from the Iron Age to the end of the 19th century was shaped to a great extent by iron ore and iron working. Bohinj was initially settled in the Iron Age – in the 7th century BC – by people from the Posočje region, drawn to Bohinj's rich iron ore deposits (Gabrovec 1987; Ogrin 2023). These Iron-Age settlers made their way eastward to Bohinj via

a relatively difficult route across high mountain passes in the Lower Bohinj mountains from the region of Tolmin (Trampuž Orel 2012). Although, by modern standards, such routes would render Bohinj inaccessible from the west, archaeological and archival evidence suggests that these routes to the west were quite active in ancient times – between iron-rich Bohinj and pre-Alpine and Friuli lowlands to the west, as well as Klagenfurt to the north (Cundrič 2002). For centuries, the need for iron was the foundation of Bohinj's ties with the world beyond its borders. Its evolving position within changing empires and political economies, as well as shifting trade routes, has continually played a decisive role in defining Bohinj's degree, or sense, of remoteness.



Photo 1: Photo of Lake Bohinj, 29 April 2017 (Authors: Anna & Michal) (Wikimedia Commons 2017)

Despite the level of connection that Bohinj enjoyed due to the need for iron, the notion of Bohinj's remoteness has become rooted in traditionally local, albeit more recent, understandings of place. The oral tradition in Bohinj abounds with stories about its remoteness; furthermore, this positionality is even written into the cultural landscape. For a long time, access to the rest of the world involved routes from the west; however, in recent history, the region's remoteness has been expressed in relation to its accessibility from the east. Ethnologist Marija Cvetek, in an analysis of Bohinj folk tales, mentions stories about a settlement named Obrne (English: *turn*) that provide a telling example. A route from the east was built by carving out the rock of a narrow valley named Soteska (*gorge*), in many places taking the form of steps – hence the route's name, Štenge (*stairs*). This made Bohinj relatively inaccessible from this direction, which inspired the name Obrne for the settlement

located where the Turks, who were making their way across the region, presumably had to turn around, thinking they had arrived at the end of the world (Mencinger 1961, cited in Cvetek 1998; see also Cvetek 1993). Until the railway from Vienna was extended through Bohinj and on to Trieste at the beginning of the 20th century, locals would often travel the *Štence* route to reach the towns of Bled or Radovljica. Travels along this route and beyond often inspired numerous stories in local lore where locals are surprised at the breadth of the world beyond Bohinj's borders, which also highlighted the distance (geographical and social) between Bohinj and the world beyond (Cvetek 1998).

The extension of the railway to Bohinj, as well as the building of the tunnel that linked Bohinj to the Posočje region, was a crucial milestone in its history. The role of iron in defining Bohinj's relation to the world changed drastically in 1890, when the central forge near Bohinjska Bistrica burned down. This event marked an abrupt end to the tradition of ironworking as well as the onset of a period of economic crisis for the region, as its residents strove to bolster other traditional subsistence practices, including alpine farming, alpine (vertical) transhumance, forestry, and woodworking (Bajuk Senčar 2005).³ The building of the railway and the tunnel proved to be an economic boon for Bohinj because it reconfigured its positioning in the existing regional landscape, establishing links to the western regions of present-day Slovenia as well as the port city of Trieste on the Adriatic. In addition, it also afforded Bohinj better accessibility to the east, through to Bled and Vienna. All this also had substantial implications for accessibility and development – including tourism development.

Bohinj's history of tourism predates this improved accessibility, overlapping strongly with the history of alpine mountaineering in the region. From the 18th century onwards, Bohinj became renowned for its natural beauty and mountains, attracting numerous famous Slovenes – scientists, writers, and humanists. They helped compile information about the flora and fauna of Bohinj's alpine landscape and facilitate forays into the mountains (Novak 1987). The origins of tourism in Bohinj extend back to 1872, to the foundation of the Friends of Triglav Association in the village of Srednja Vas to support the growing numbers of people coming to Bohinj to go on mountain treks. Tourism during this period was linked almost exclusively with excursions into the alpine mountain landscape – to the extent that the word tourist at that time (*alpinist*) meant mountaineer, climber, or traveller (Novak 1987). While still a fledgling industry, the increasing levels of tourist interest in Bohinj provided locals with employment opportunities and encouraged significant investments, with the first hotel being built in 1887 (Budkovič 2004).

Bohinj's new positioning on the railway system also encouraged the further development of the tourist industry, which had until then been centred on alpine/mountain tourism. Organised tourism began in 1907 with the founding of Društvo za privabitev tujcev za Bohinjsko Bistrico z okolico in občino Srednjo vas (*Society for Attracting Foreigners to*

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For literature about animal transhumance, a subsistence strategy in Bohinj with roots going back to antiquity, and its significance for the development of Bohinj, see, for example, Novak 1989; Ledinek Lozej 2013).

Bohinjska Bistrica with its Surrounding Areas and the Municipality of Srednja Vas). This heralded a very prosperous period of Bohinj tourism, during which members of local tourist organisations planned and built additional tourism infrastructure to attract visitors. They were also active in regional tourist organisations, securing funding for investments at the regional level, where tourism had become a priority in light of the steadily increasing number of visitors to the area (Budkovič 2004). The building of the tunnel shifted the focus of tourism from the mountains to the valleys – primarily to the area around Bohinjska Bistrica, where the train station is located. Most tourist attractions were linked to winter sports: sledging/tobogganing, skating, and skiing.

The history of the production of Bohinj as a tourist destination in the 20th century has been marked by numerous crises and considerable upheaval – both political and economic – and continually reconfigured its position *vis à vis* the world beyond its borders. During World War I, for example, Bohinj's location on the railway network contributed to it becoming a strategic part of the hinterland supply system to the Soča (*Isonzo*) Front when Italy declared war on the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1915. During the war, life in Bohinj was subordinated to the needs of the armed forces, meaning that the entire region from the eastern edge of Lake Bohinj westwards to the Soča Front was transformed into a militarised zone inaccessible to civilians (Budkovič 1999).⁴ When Slovenia became part of the Yugoslav monarchy and the western part of present-day Slovenia came under Italian rule during the interwar period, Bohinj experienced a substantial change in the make-up of its foreign guests, who came mostly from different parts of the monarchy – particularly wealthy guests, who owned or rented villas for the duration of their stay. Tourism development halted again during and in the years immediately after World War II, which left a devastating mark on Bohinj's communities and landscape (Kopač 1987). The first decades of the post-war socialist period were dedicated primarily to rebuilding, including the revival of tourist organisations and tourist events or festivals (Habinc 2014). The most successful period of postwar tourism was the 1970s and 1980s, characterised by *sindikalni turizem* (*trade union tourism*), which involved excursions companies from all over Yugoslavia organised for their employees. Bohinj's success during this period was characterised by institutionally organised tourism from Yugoslavia (but not at the level of wealthy elites) as well as increasing numbers of foreign tourists during the “high” summer and winter seasons, which provided the Bohinj tourism industry with a level of stability. In addition, significant investments were made to improve tourism infrastructure, and financial support was offered to locals to take on tourism as a supplemental livelihood strategy. This period of stability and growth ended with Slovenia's independence and the ensuing war among the former Yugoslav republics, which resulted in the dissolution of *sindikalni turizem* at the federal level. In addition, Slovenia's transition process involved political and economic restructuring, including the privatisa-

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The transformation of Bohinj into the hinterland of the Soča Front was memorialised during the centenary of WWI with the creation of thematic tourist routes, thus incorporating this part of history into Bohinj's tourist landscape (see Bajuk Senčar 2018; Repič 2018).

tion of its hotels. This decades-long process unfolded hand in hand with Bohinj once again reconfiguring its position in existing tourist markets (Bajuk Senčar 2005).

The history of tourism outlined above depicts how Bohinj evolved as a tourist destination, starting as a region renowned for the beauty of its mountainous landscape, attracting primarily alpinists or mountain climbers, who later came in increasing numbers. New transportation networks serving as technologies of connectivity have played a strong role in the continued development of Bohinj as a tourist destination. Railroad lines served as channels for transporting goods and services, bolstering social, economic and political ties, and, of course, facilitating the visits of tourists. However, these same networks also became the foundation for isolation, as its strategic positioning led to it becoming part of a militarised zone during WWI. After the war, Bohinj's relational positioning encouraged new forms of social and economic cooperation at a time when tourism became a regional priority, resulting in locally- and regionally-funded initiatives and investments that fostered the development of this livelihood strategy. Changing regimes, international/global conflicts, and the rise and fall of political and economic systems contributed to the continual remaking of Bohinj as a tourist destination – as well as its remoteness. The following section will examine how decisions and politics at the local level contributed to tourism imaginaries about Bohinj as a remote tourist destination.

TOURISM IMAGINARIES: FROM A SLOVENIAN SWITZERLAND TO AN ALPINE OASIS

Despite having a relatively long history of tourism, Bohinj has had relatively few broad-based initiatives to promote itself as a tourist destination. Bohinj's renown was initially based on the natural beauty of its mountains. Analysts portray how its tourism actors – including its fledgling tourism societies – strove to recast Bohinj as a winter destination after the building of the tunnel. These societies – also supported by regional tourism organisations – strove to take advantage of the opportunities that railway access could offer Bohinj and the entire Gorenjska region (Batagelj 2009). Given its location on the railway and the natural features of its landscape, Bohinj was singled out as a potential destination for zimsko-športni turizem (*winter sports tourism*), rendering it a so-called “Slovenian Switzerland”:

We have no more suitable place than Bohinj [...]. The snow lies there – we would say – the longest in the whole of Carniola, toboggan runs can be set up at a relatively low cost, there are plenty of places to practise skiing, ski jumps can be built, sledding is possible, and the lake offers a large and first-class ice rink (Anon. 1909: 75).

This description of Bohinj in an article on winter tourism in the serial publication *Promet in gostilna* (Transport and Tavern) depicts an imaginary of Bohinj as a place whose natural landscape could render it an ideal winter sports destination. This image was fostered by varied groups and businesses that aimed to promote Bohinj as a “Slovenian Switzerland” (Batagelj 2009). These activities included the building of winter tourism infrastructure (skat-

ing rink, sledding course) in conjunction with special railway schedules and discounts that encouraged travel to Bohinj, including special weekend cars and room to transport sports equipment, such as skating and sledding gear (Bajuk Senčar 2015).

Less attention was paid to developing a common tourism imaginary to promote Bohinj from the beginning of WWI through to the rebuilding of Bohinj after the devastation left behind by WWII. The first step in this direction was an overall image campaign for Bohinj, which was launched in the 1980s by the company Alpinum, which at the time owned five hotels in the area. This campaign did not focus on Bohinj as a “Slovenian Switzerland” perfect for winter sports. Instead, Alpinum launched the slogan *Bohinj, oaza Alp* (*Bohinj, oasis of the Alps*) that centred on the region’s natural beauty, alpine features, and remoteness – an untouched place at the heart of an alpine landscape (Provital 2012b). The “Bohinj, oasis of the Alps” campaign was not limited to promoting a specific kind of tourism but instead was meant to promote Bohinj as a tourist destination for all seasons (Provital, 2012b: 18–19). The logo depicted one of the iconic images associated with Bohinj: the Church of St. John the Baptist, John’s Bridge (*Janezov most*), and Bohinj Lake.



Photo 2: Photograph of Church of St. John the Baptist and Bohinj Lake,
1 June 2007 (Author: Rosino) (Wikimedia Commons 2007).

While the promotion of Bohinj as an oasis of the Alps ran its course, the notion of Bohinj as an oasis has become an enduring element of the imaginary of Bohinj as a tourist destination. One can encounter it in local tourism development documents, official tourism websites, and promotional material used by individual tourism service providers. For example, Bohinj’s tourism development strategy for the period between 2012 and 2016 envisions Bohinj as “an oasis of authentic and relaxing surprises” (*oaza pristnih in sproščujočih presenečenj*) (Provital 2012a: 25). The imaginary of Bohinj as an oasis of authentic and relaxing surprises is later repeated in the strategic documents for tourism development for

the 2017–2021 period (Provital 2017). It is also evoked by numerous promotional tourism websites, albeit in different permutations. For example, Bohinj is described as “an oasis of peace and pristine nature” on Slovenia’s national tourism website.⁵ The official website for the Julian Alps depicts Bohinj as “the hidden oasis of peace in the embrace of the Julian Alps in the heart of the Triglav National Park with the largest natural lake in Slovenia.”⁶ Bohinj Tourism’s official website currently promotes Bohinj as an “oasis for responsible tourism.”⁷ Furthermore, the vision of Bohinj as an oasis has been a recurring theme in surveys conducted with residents and local tourism actors in preparation for the 2030 tourism strategy.⁸ This same theme also appears in depictions of Bohinj used by individual tourism providers, including those who rent out private rooms or homes, such as the owners of a holiday house called *Escape to Bohinj*, located in the village of Stara Fužina, who depict Bohinj as an “oasis of calm.”⁹ Many of these formulations draw on elements that have long been identified with Bohinj’s natural landscape, as is the case in the following excerpt from a website for renting accommodation in the village of Ukanc: “Dear guests! Do you want to discover a hidden oasis of unspoiled nature, beautiful mountain[s], climbing, and cycling paths nestled in the Julian Alps and Triglav National Park? Here we are; here awaits our offer for you.”¹⁰

While the natural features highlighted in such promotion campaigns have varied over time, virtually all efforts to lure visitors to the area have centred on local natural landscapes. What is interesting to note is that the evocations of Bohinj as a natural oasis first launched by the *Alpinum* image campaign in the 1980s roughly coincide with the expansion of Slovenia’s only national park – Triglav National Park – to include almost one-third of the Bohinj municipality, including many of its key tourist landmarks in 1981.¹¹ As is apparent from the advertisement described above, the notion that these landmarks and attractions form part of a protected area is incorporated into and underlines the area’s depiction as an oasis.

The concept of oasis also communicates an understanding of nature as unchanging and separate from the rest of the world – a place to get away from it all – that in turn serves as a powerfully evocative strategy of tourism promotion (e.g. Norum and Mostafanezhband 2016). While existing routes of mobility and growing renown as a tourist destination render Bohinj increasingly connected to the tourism industry on a global scale, it still promotes itself as a remote destination of pristine nature. This imaginary was also evoked in discus-

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I Feel Slovenia, n.d.

6

Julijske Alpe, n.d.

7

Bohinj, Slovenia, n.d.

8

Bohinj, Slovenija, n.d.

9

Escape to Bohinj, n.d.

10

ALPREN, n.d.

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For more on the establishment and evolution of Triglav National Park and its heritagisation, see, among others, Bajuk Senčar 2012, as well as the Triglav National Park website (Triglavski narodni park n.d.).

sions with my interlocutors, particularly when discussing discrepancies between projected images and lived experiences. In the following section, the discussion turns to the rhythmic nature of tourism and the issue of tourism seasonality, which has been a perennial question for the tourism industry in Bohinj since the beginning of the century.

RHYTHMS OF TOURISM SEASONALITY

As mentioned in the previous section, the seasonality of tourism has been a topic of interest for local tourism actors since the early 20th century, when concerted and coordinated efforts were made at the local and regional levels to expand the winter tourist season. The following ethnographic discussion examines how interlocutors presently define Bohinj's changing tourism seasonality as well as the impact of tourist rhythms on everyday life and experiences of place. In what terms do people in Bohinj talk about tourism seasonality and the other rhythms that shape their everyday lives?

One of the most common narratives linked to tourism seasonality is that of the tourism industry itself, whose language and indicators are primarily quantitative. In this context, tourism seasonality is defined in terms of criteria that can be measured: the number of tourist arrivals, overnight stays, tickets purchased, parking spaces used, etc. This sort of data serves as a basis for tourism industry analyses and strategies, including defining the timing and duration of tourist seasons. One of my interlocutors, a tourism official, employs such a narrative to convey the current dimensions of the high season in the summer:

More and more beds are available [for tourist accommodation], a few hundred new beds a year, now between 9.500 and ten thousand beds are available in summer. [...] I think we are pretty close to ten thousand beds, which is huge considering there are only about five thousand of us. There are twice as many available beds as permanent residents, and there can also be up to ten thousand day tourists on a sunny day visiting on the weekend, so we may go from 5.500 permanent residents to twenty-five thousand, five times [more]. (Interview 1, 18. 4. 2024)¹²

While the number of available beds and overnight stays provides important information about the high summer season, it only provides part of the story, as these numbers refer to tourists who stay in Bohinj for at least one night. However, as my interlocutor mentions above, the visits of so-called stationary guests overlap with those of daily visitors, whose numbers are not limited by the number of available beds. Just as the categories of tourists visiting Bohinj can vary widely, including daily/weekend visitors, bathers, cyclists, and hikers, so do the rhythm, duration, and spatial trajectories of their visits.

Examining local experiences of tourism seasonality involves identifying the rhythms that residents and tourism actors associate with it – including how they interpret the evolution of seasonality over time. When I first conducted research on tourism in Bohinj in the

12

All interviews (conducted in spring of 2024) are anonymous and were conducted in Slovenian; the translations into English are mine.

summers of 2001 and 2002, my interlocutors often compared their experiences with their memories of Bohinj tourism before Slovenian independence – an event that brought with it the dissolution of the Yugoslav trade union tourism system (Bajuk Senčar 2005). This resulted in an increase in the seasonal nature of tourism, at least in the short run, as locals adapted to new circumstances. The high season was in the summer, with the peak taking place during the so-called *kopalna sezona* (English: *swimming season*) at Lake Bohinj.¹³ The peak of the season was relatively short, lasting from the beginning or middle of July until the end of August – depending primarily on the timing of summer vacations as well as the weather.

I remember when I was about ten years old, something like that. When it was the first of September, when school started, the roads were empty. There was no one. Now, let's say, when I look at the amount of business in the restaurant, sometimes it is better in September than in June. Actually, it has always been better in September than in June. But before, it was completely empty once September came around. (Interview 2, 7. 6. 2024)

I know because I have worked in tourism in the Gorenjska region before, and I can compare the seasons. [...] I remember that in Bohinj sometimes, on the first of September, things would die down. We would work very, very little in September. There was still a little work until 15th September, but almost nothing more after that. (Interview 3, 4. 6. 2024)

As is apparent from these two excerpts, the rhythm of the summer season, lasting from July through September, was marked by the presence/absence of tourists in the region, particularly on the roads. The duration of the summer season was an established norm that operated as a benchmark with which interlocutors marked the evolution of tourism seasonality and the distinctiveness of tourism in the present.

My interlocutors emphasised that the most important feature of Bohinj's tourism development over the last decade is that the summer season has become significantly more pronounced from 2014 onwards, particularly in terms of a growing number of overnight stays and daily tourists during the summer. At the same time, there was a decrease in overnight stays in the winter, which interlocutors attribute to changes in winter weather, specifically the lack of snow, a manifestation of change in climactic rhythms.

The graph will show it better. Look: here is 2018, with those spikes over the summer becoming more pronounced in comparison to the winter season, which was really bad that year. Here's a slightly longer period, from 2014 to 2018. Here, you can see how the summer has become really pronounced from 2014 onwards, whereas it is significantly less so in the off-season. (Interview 1, 18. 4. 2024)

The pronounced spikes pointed out by my interlocutor represent a change in the rhythms of the summer season, a heightened concentration of tourist visits during the

13

While the high season was linked to summer activities, particularly swimming, other activities linked to Bohinj tourism, such as climbing or hiking, had a much broader/longer, albeit less intense season. During this period, the winter season was well-established, particularly in relation to recent years, but not as strong as the summer season. In both cases, the winter season strongly depended on climactic factors, i.e. the possibility of snow.

peaks of the high season. These developments have spurred numerous debates concerning the potential impact – environmental, social, or economic – of the high concentrations of tourists, most of whom travel to and from Bohinj by car. Many of these discussions centre around a temporal conundrum: how to adapt existing infrastructure to deal with a problem that exists for only two months out of the year?

In principle, there is a lot of talk about problems, about Bohinj becoming a parking lot and so on – but, in fact, we have this problem for only two months [out of the year]. If you drive around Bohinj today, you will not have any trouble. We have also realised that it is bearable if it rains on 15th July [during the high season]. People are in the apartments, and traffic is not a problem. I would say that the day visitors make up this apparent crowd. (Interview 4, 18. 4. 2024)

As is apparent from this excerpt, finding a solution to the problems provoked by spikes in tourist visits is hindered by their intermittent rhythm and relatively short duration. Another important issue brought up by the interlocutor above is linked to the rhythm of the visits of a particular group of tourists: day tourists. The volume and timing of day tourist visits are not determined by the number of available beds or the schedules of buses or trains. Instead, their visits often follow a weekly rhythm, as they come mainly on weekends with good weather. Thus, on a sunny weekend at the peak of the summer season, the number of tourists (including day tourists) far exceeds the number of local residents. When talking about their experiences of the summer seasons, interlocutors working in the tourism sector often highlight the discrepancy between the imaginary of Bohinj as a natural oasis and the crowds that dominate the landscape during the high season:

Our infrastructure is not built for this number of people – not the roads, not the parking lots. I am not at all in favour of parking in green areas because I think that if we advertise Bohinj as a destination of pristine nature, we can't have people leaving their cars all over the place, maybe even causing a natural disaster like leaking oil into the groundwater. (Interview 2, 7. 6. 2024)

In addition to the intensification of the peak of the high season, the summer season has expanded in both directions – in the months before and after the peak months of July and August. This trend started before the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic and has continued from the post-pandemic period to the present day:

I remember when I moved to Bohinj, we used to joke that there was no more tourism after 15th August, or just maybe some weekends. That has changed a lot in the last ten years. [...] Now, in principle, there is an unwritten rule that Easter or 1st May is the kick-off [of the season], and the end is sometime in late September or mid-October. (Interview 5, 3. 7. 2024).

While there seemed to be a consensus among my interlocutors about general shifts in tourism seasonality, they would define their experiences of seasonality in diverse, sometimes even divergent ways. This was largely due to the nature and extent of their involvement with tourism. For example, a growing number of Bohinj residents rent out private rooms during the peak summer season. This has been a long-standing practice in Bohinj's tourism history (Bajuk

Senčar 2005), which has become increasingly widespread given the virtually guaranteed high numbers of tourists during the peak of the summer season. However, most who rent out rooms do so to supplement their income, with the duration of their tourism practice coinciding with the two-month peak of the season. Thus, for them, the high season is an intense period during which renting out rooms is a lucrative, part-time subsistence practice. Their rhythm of tourism practice differs significantly from that of the owners and employees of hotels, small inns, restaurants, and other food establishments that operate virtually year-round. Tourism, for them, is a primary subsistence practice, and they strive to extend their work season as long as possible. There are also other tourism service providers, such as tour guides and operators, who tailor their hours and service packages to the varied needs of tourists across the seasons and the timing of local tourism events (hiking/fishing/skiing season, festivals, etc.). Many of these actors also strive to have as long a season as possible to offset the low season months.

The degree of people's involvement in tourism inform the extent to which they have to coordinate or harmonise the different daily rhythms of work activity. Many who rent out rooms talked about this practice as an "afternoon" activity, something they dealt with after work – a temporal compartmentalisation. Those who strive to make tourism their primary source of livelihood prioritise the rhythms of tourism and do not problematise the overlaps or clashes between the rhythms of tourism practice and other everyday rhythms, often justifying the dominance of high-season rhythms as the cost of success. However, for those actors whose livelihoods are indirectly linked to tourism, the overlap of certain rhythms and their manifestation in the landscape is problematic. This is particularly relevant in the case of those involved in subsistence practices, whose seasons of operation overlap with tourism seasons in Bohinj, which can potentially lead to conflicts. As a municipal official explains, farmers, whose work is integral to local development, comprise such a group:

We have also observed a link between tourism and agriculture. The cultural landscape, if we maintain it, that is, if we keep cultivating it, helps attract tourists. However, the seasonality [of tourism] causes problems [for farmers] because summer is also the time for most agricultural tasks. Tensions arise due to the pressures of tourism on the roads and the hindered accessibility to the routes used by tourists and cyclists, but tractors also need them to get to their plots of land. (Interview 6, 25. 4. 2024)

Many farmers may be involved in the tourism industry to varying degrees, from renting out rooms in the high season to supplying food to local tourist establishments, the latter being a form of cooperation that has become an important tenet of municipal development programmes. Furthermore, numerous municipal and park officials recognise the key role that farmers play in maintaining Bohinj's cultural landscape. However, the intensity of the high season can cause tensions due to the overlap between the rhythms of tourists and farmers, especially when these rhythms imply the use of the same routes and spaces, albeit for different reasons. Heavy traffic and limited accessibility form the lens through which farmers as social actors define and experience the periods that comprise tourism seasonality.

The people I spoke to would talk about diverse sites of congestion, to which they

would ascribe different levels of significance. An interlocutor whose spouse commuted to work outside Bohinj would mention the heavy traffic on the roads during the high season, requiring people to plan for longer commute times. Others would mention the congestion in parking lots, stores, and local landmarks. These chronic issues linked to tourism seasonality were often a topic addressed in local development strategies: how to deal with issues linked to tourism seasonality? What strategies would be most appropriate? What sort of tourism do Bohinj residents wish to have? As an interlocutor explains in the following excerpt, these are not straightforward questions:

There was a discussion at the last meeting of the municipal committee for tourism and agriculture about distributing tourism development evenly across all four seasons. As someone who works in tourism, I understand this; but as a resident of a tourist area, I am completely fine with tourists not being around so much during most of the year because of how it affects me personally... because it is so hard during the summer, so intense, because we are all working beyond our limits, because there is always a shortage of staff and you always have to intervene, because afterward, you need months to recover. (Interview 7, 16. 4. 2024)

While the idea of being able to distribute tourism practices and visitors evenly year-round seems like a logical goal for those working in tourism, this interlocutor mentions an important issue: the benefits of the off-season. Many interlocutors talked about the fact that the peak of the high season is not sustainable year-round, echoing the sentiments mentioned above about the need for time to recover from the demands of the high season. One of the ways that this intensity manifests itself, as is alluded to above, is the intensity of work during the high season, which necessitates hiring additional staff that, due to Bohinj's relative remoteness, is a chronic challenge. The long work hours in the tourism sector during the high season and Bohinj's relative distance from urban centres doesn't always make daily commuting feasible, and there is little housing available in Bohinj that is not intended for tourists, as renting to them, albeit for short periods, is more lucrative than long-term rentals. In the face of chronic shortages of seasonal staff, the rhythm of work for long-term staff becomes longer and more intense during the summer. The off-season months are described as vacation time or time to rest:

Everyone likes that November is quiet; everyone needs a rest. We try to have November to ourselves. Tourist workers go on holiday then, maybe somewhere warm. They can have time to themselves then... After that, for springtime, we like to have peace and a little rest in the spring, from, say, the second half of March onwards. So, even if two months are bad for tourism – November and the period between the second half of March and the first half of April – it suits everyone quite well to have a little bit more time off and some time to ourselves. (Interview 8, 13. 5. 2024)

The difference between the summer/winter tourism seasons and mid-March/mid-April and November as the off-season can be quite stark, as many places central to daily life during the season are closed during the off-season months. As mentioned earlier, most rent out rooms only during the high season, and many businesses, such as pension houses, restaurants, and even cafes, coordinate to close for limited periods. The emptiness and lack of activity/business in Bohinj during these months may be off-putting for potential visitors

during the off-season as well as for some residents, while others welcome the lack of tourists during these periods:

Otherwise, I think that November is nice for us because there are still a lot of us, about six hundred, seven hundred [in the village]. There will be a problem if, in thirty years, there will be only a hundred of us. That is the problem [we face], you understand. But now, things are great [during November]; we take a break from tourism, but we still meet. The shops aren't crowded, you have time to chat, people are more relaxed, and so on. (Interview 9, 7. 6. 2024)

In the excerpt above, a resident from a Bohinj village heavily involved in tourism describes the off-season months as a time when people are able to indulge in the daily social activities and rhythms of local life – when things go “back to normal”. However, the interlocutor also expresses concern for the future prospects of the village community, which are indelibly intertwined with imagined and experienced senses of remoteness. Bohinj's identity as a tourist destination operates as a double-edged sword. Residents have historically been able to cultivate and benefit from the beauty of its natural landscape, much of which is now encompassed in a protected area. However, this success manifests itself in rhythms of tourism practice that, given the imaginary of Bohinj they are trying to project, can be seen to undermine local tourism strategies. The impact of these rhythms, in turn, evokes questions about the long-term sustainability of tourism as a subsistence practice. These questions, coupled with Bohinj's relative distance from urban and economic centres, result in concerns about the emptying of local village communities, particularly on the part of the younger generation that may decide to make a future for themselves elsewhere, beyond Bohinj's borders.

CONCLUSION

This ethnographic discussion centres on exploring how attention to rhythms and the rhythmic dimension of tourism practice can shed light on the imaginaries and experiences of remoteness in Bohinj. The distinctiveness of Bohinj, as that of any given place, lies in the specificity of its “polyrhythmic chorus of the everyday” (Conlon 2010: 71), comprised of a complex array of social, biological, institutional, mechanical (and other) rhythmic practices through which it is continually made and remade. Identifying and examining these rhythms facilitates the analytical shift from imaginaries to the processes that underpin their continual (re)production. These practices are multiple and varied, including tourist arrivals and departures, the range of hourly, daily, monthly, and seasonal timetables that frame tourism practices in Bohinj, as well as the remaining routines and rhythms that continually define its distinctive sense of place.

Rhythms of mobility play a crucial role in the processes that continually shape Bohinj as a tourist destination, be they the rhythmic comings and goings of tourists or the trajectories of their visits through its landscape. Focusing on the temporal dimension of touristic rhythms of mobility offers insights into questions related to the impacts of tourism that result from the intensification of tourist seasons, which can be especially challenging for

rural or remote tourist destinations, as has been demonstrated in similar destinations in Slovenia's alpine regions (e.g. Svetel and Zavrtnik 2025). Exploring the rhythmic aspects of tourist seasonality, which is often understood in terms of the saturation of place through tourist flows, makes it possible to address the issue of intermittence that manifests itself in terms of presence/absence. As mentioned in the interview excerpts, one of the challenges of tourism seasonality as a social problem for tourism is linked to its rhythmic nature. The intensity and intermittence of tourism seasons are challenging to address because they do not seem constant. It is difficult to agree on a strategy because the problems can be experienced or depicted as short-term – i.e. “for only two months out of the year” – even if the problems re-occur the following year.

Another important issue that arises from attention to tourist rhythms is associated with the variety of contemporary tourist practices. Exploring the multiplicity of rhythms aids in analytically decentring essentialist approaches to tourists or tourist practices (Edensor 2011; Čapo 2022). In a similar vein, attention to the multiplicity of actors in a tourist destination and their varied experiences and interpretations of tourist rhythms can aid in decentring static or reified understandings of tourist seasons and their interplay with other, everyday rhythmic practices. Such an approach can aid in grounding and mapping out experiences of seasonality that flesh out a period that is “only two months out of the year”. The diverse ways that Bohinj residents and tourist actors experience the rhythms of tourist practice are contingent upon numerous factors, including the extent to which they consider the rhythms of tourism to be harmonised or synchronised with the polyrhythmic tempo of their everyday lives, including their mobility. Identifying the different rhythms that comprise the polyrhythms of the tourist season can shed light on sites of congestion by approaching them as episodes of arrhythmia resulting from intersecting – and potentially irreconcilable – routines, daily tempos, and trajectories. Exploring, in turn, how residents, tourism actors, tourists, and others interpret or experience these episodes can illuminate moments of contestation or divergence that provide a nuanced perspective on an issue often reduced to an oppositional dynamic between tourists and residents, guests and hosts.

The ethnographic case study of Bohinj has included tracking the processes that have helped shape it as a tourist destination, emphasizing the building of tourist infrastructures and infrastructures of mobility – with increased accessibility facilitating the flows of visitors. Yet, as Vannini demonstrated, the significance of these mobilities for the relative positioning of remote places is complex, for mobilities, and the routes along which they occur, generate interdependence (Vannini 2012). This especially holds true in the case of tourism mobilities. The success of promoting Bohinj as a natural oasis, existing at a remove from the regular everyday, hinges on flows of (tourist) mobility: one depends on the other. The presence of tourists is a manifestation of this interdependence, both in spatial and rhythmic terms.

Furthermore, tourists also help shape and subvert remote tourism imaginaries (Salaazar 2012) through their choice of destination, their activities, and the timing of their visits. The rhythms and trajectories of the mobile practices to, from, and within a place play a formative role in the processual dynamics shaping experiences of remoteness as they are the

conduits through which social actors experience accessibility and distance. The sites of congestion or moments of arrhythmia that result from the intersection of multiple rhythms of mobile practice can be understood in relative terms, as connective or distancing practices that underpin potentially multiple understandings of place and remoteness. They include, for example, the inflows of tourists searching for experiences of remoteness, the commuting of seasonal tourism workers, the outflows of residents commuting to work due to the relative distance from centres of employment. These different mobilities are manifestations of diverse understandings or experiences of remoteness that intersect and shape Bohinj through rhythmic practices. They also contribute to the continual evolution of tourism's seasonality – and, albeit indirectly, to ongoing deliberations about the role of tourism in Bohinj's development and future.

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POVZETEK

Avtorica v članku preučuje vzajemno konstitutivno razmerje med odročnostjo in povezanostjo v alpski turistični destinaciji Bohinj v Sloveniji. Etnografska analiza temelji na znanstvenih razpravah o turističnih imaginarijih, odročnosti in sezonskosti kot oblika časovnega ritma. S pomočjo arhivskih/medijskih raziskav in etnografskega terenskega dela avtorica raziskuje, kako se je alpski kraj Bohinj v Sloveniji začel prikazovati kot izolirana, odročna turistična destinacija in kako se imaginarij odročnosti pojavlja v vsakdanjem življenju. Analiza, kako predstava o Bohinju kot oddaljeni, odročni turistični destinaciji vpliva na

vsakdanje življenje, je neločljivo povezana s časovnimi ali sezonskimi razsežnostmi turizma. Razpravo strukturira etnografska raziskava o ritmični ali sezonski naravi turizma, ki se osredotoča na dve glavni vprašanji: spreminjanje ritmov turistične sezone prakse ter doživljanje turistične sezone s strani prebivalcev Bohinja in turističnih akterjev. Raziskovanje ritmične, sezone narave turizma služi preučevanju medsebojnega vpliva med imaginariji in izkušnjami odročnosti ter raziskovanju vpliva turizma kot gospodarske strategije na vsakdanje življenje v oddaljenih območjih.