

Fragile Sustainability or Sustainable Fragility? Local Understanding of Global Terms in the Logar Valley



Krhka trajnostnost ali trajnostna krhkost? Lokalno razumevanje globalnih pojmov v Logarski dolini

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the materialisations of sustainability in the Logar Valley, an Alpine tourist destination in Slovenia. Drawing on ethnographic research, we examine how sustainability is understood and enacted by local tourism service providers, highlighting four key themes: food practices, the temporalities of tourism, transport, and environmental care. We argue that the local perceptions of sustainability, fragility, and tradition, especially when understood in the context of tourism, function as closely interlinked emic concepts. They serve as a tool or discursive strategy according to which the various actors in Solčavsko position themselves within the multiplicity of social relations between us and them, past and future, nature and culture, tradition and innovation, good and bad. They can thus be understood as socially acceptable tools used by the actors to express their interests in a way that makes these interests appear as “objective”, “rational” or “universally valid” truths.

KEYWORDS: environment, temporality, care, transport, food, tourism, Logar Valley

IZVLEČEK

Članek obravnava materializacijo trajnostnosti v Logarski dolini, alpski turistični destinaciji v Sloveniji. Na podlagi etnografskih raziskav preučujeva, kako trajnostni razvoj razumejo in izvajajo lokalni turistični ponudniki, pri čemer izpostavlja štiri ključne teme: prehranjevalne prakse, časovne značilnosti turizma, prevoz in z njim povezano infrastrukturo ter skrb

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za okolje. Ugotavlja, da lokalne predstave o trajnostnosti, krhkosti in tradiciji, zlasti če jih razumemo v kontekstu turizma, delujejo kot med seboj tesno povezani emski koncepti. Predstavljajo namreč orodje ali diskurzivno strategijo za različne akterje na Solčavskem, na podlagi katere se pozicionirajo v mnogoterih družbenih odnosih med nami in njimi, preteklostjo in prihodnostjo, naravo in kulturo, tradicijo in inovacijo, dobrim in slabim. Lokalna dojemanja trajnostnosti lahko torej razumemo tudi kot družbeno sprejemljiva orodja, s katerimi akterji svoje interese izražajo na način, ki jih kaže kot »objektivne«, »racionalne« ali »univerzalno veljavne« resnice.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: okolje, časovnost, skrb, prevoz, prehrana, turizem, Logarska dolina

INTRODUCTION

In a recent reflection on the sustainability of an anthropology of the Anthropocene, T. H. Eriksen briefly comments on the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a massive United Nations (UN) project that began in 2015. He notes that the word sustainability is “used extensively” in this project and that the broadness of this list poses a risk that sustainability will become “a vacuous placeholder” (Eriksen 2022: 4). Eriksen’s critique of the term sustainability becoming overused and emptied of its content, thus sounding more like a buzzword (with ideological connotations) than a scientific term within the development strategies, is one of the underlying motivations for writing this article.

It has been widely pointed out in anthropology that the term is loaded with “contradictions, abuses and politically motivated uses” (Brightman and Lewis 2017: 1), and we have encountered similar contradictions in our research. Although there exists what T. H. Eriksen (2022: 1) refers to as “common consent” about what sustainability means,¹ we approach it as a broad, ever evolving framework that encompasses economic, environmental, cultural, and social dimensions. Our research prioritises the emic interpretations of sustainability, focusing specifically on how local tourism providers in the Logar Valley in the Slovenian Alps understand and use the term and how it affects their tourist practices. Therefore, our analysis does not take the concept “as is” or rethinks its theoretical implications, but rather explores the local dynamics and perceptions that gravitate around “sustainability”. Other undoubtedly relevant viewpoints – namely the (re)framing of large- and small-scale sustainability or “organic” discourses within agriculture and especially high-mountain farming in Slovenia, as well as the relations between these discourses and more structural aspects, such as the (national and EU) policies with their numerous forms of financial supports and subsidies – will not be discussed in this article (see Bartulović and Kozorog 2014; Frelih Larsen 2009; Knežević Hočevar 2018; Slovinc and Erjavec 2021).

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In Eriksen’s view (2022:1) by common consent, sustainability “refers to quality enabling something to sustain itself, in other words, to be capable of reproducing itself without undermining the conditions of its own existence.” By further noting the need to acknowledge the incorporation of changes in this definition, he proposes a “less rigid definition”, which suggests, that “a sustainable system is one which is capable of reproducing itself for an extended period without undermining its own conditions, absorbing incremental changes without collapsing” (Eriksen 2022: 1).

Acknowledging the importance of local histories and contexts, we use the Logar Valley as a case study to explore how sustainability materialises in a specific place and time. Our research in the broader region of Solčavsko has been ongoing since 2020, when we, together with another colleague, Blaž Bajič, co-organised the first Ethnological Summer Camp, which now takes place annually. The camp consists of a week of field research for students, thematic lectures by mentors, and close collaboration with the local community in Solčavsko. The findings presented in this paper are therefore also based on the contributions of the students, Blaž Bajič, Sandi Abram, Jaka Repič, and other colleagues who participated in the ethnological camps or contributed to the published research volumes (Bajič, Svetel and Zavratnik 2021; Svetel, Zavratnik and Bajič 2022), as well as other research at least partially related to the aforementioned camp (Bajič 2023; 2024; Korbar 2024; Krašovic 2022; Svetel 2022; Vršnik 2022, 2024, etc.). In the period between 2020 and 2024, almost ninety interviews were conducted by students and researchers, with some people repeatedly. We have also organised round tables and presentations of student research, participated in community public events, and visited the region for tourism purposes. Since 2022, the research activities have intensified as part of the DigiFREN project, which addresses the digital aestheticization of fragile environments.

More detailed conversations focusing on the concept of sustainability in the Logar Valley were carried out in 2024, when we conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with five tourism service providers in the valley in which we addressed their perception of sustainability and the sustainable practices they conduct. However, since sustainability was introduced as the central topic of our discussions when we contacted our interlocutors, we acknowledge that this emphasis might have shaped our interlocutors' responses. Given the "symbolic resource" (Apostoli Capello 2023) attached to the term in public discourse in Solčavsko and beyond, using alternative terminology, such as tradition, ecology, local knowledge or care for the environment – or avoidance of using any of these often empty signifiers – could have brought different concerns to light.

THE SETTING

The Slovenian Tourist Board describes the Logar Valley as "one of the most beautiful Alpine glacier valleys in Europe. The harmonious coexistence between tradition, man and nature that you will find in this area of Solčavsko is exceptional and rarely experienced anywhere else" (Slovenian Tourist Board 2024). We will take a critical look at the notions of "harmonious coexistence" later to unravel its meanings and implications in this local context but let us first briefly introduce the location and its specificities.

Solčavsko can be considered a typical Alpine area, but at the same time, it is also a very specific environment. It is located in the north of Slovenia, on the Austrian border in the Kamnik-Savinja Alps, and with almost 550 people living on around 103 km², it is the most sparsely populated municipality in Slovenia (Občina Solčava 2024). It consists of three glacial valleys – the Logar Valley being one of them – that form four settlements (Logar-

ska dolina, Robanov kot, Matkov kot, Podolševa), and numerous farms that are dispersed throughout the glacial valleys. Today, Solčavsko and especially Logar Valley are increasingly popular tourist destinations, but until 1894, when the first road connected Solčavsko to other parts of the Upper Savinja Valley, the region was difficult to access and relatively isolated. Many farms in Solčavsko are located at high altitudes, well above 1000 metres above sea level. With an average size of 130 ha (Občina Solčava 2024), the farms of Solčavsko are, for socio-historical reasons, much larger than the average farm in Slovenia, which measures only 7.0 ha (SURS 2021).



Photo 1: Map of Solčavsko. The Centre Rinka website.

The area that is the focus of our research, the Logar Valley, is not only the most iconic part of the region (Klaus 2010), but is also registered as a landscape park. The first organised activities in nature conservation there date back to 1931, when there was a desire to protect its “natural beauty” as the number of visitors to the surrounding mountain tops increased. Efforts were made to establish the Logarska dolina-Okrešelj National Park, but due to the Second World War, this did not happen (Gerl 2004: 102–110; see also Poličnik 2008). It wasn’t until 1987 that the Municipality of Mozirje declared the area a landscape park (Naravni parki Slovenije 2024). In 1992 the concession to manage the park was awarded to the company Logarska dolina d.o.o., which was run by members of the local community (Gerl 2004: 6; Lenar 2021: 135). As the locals say, this way of managing a protected area – namely,

that it was being managed by the locals themselves – was the first such case in Slovenia. In 2017, however, the concession to manage the park was transferred back to the municipality (now the Municipality of Solčava) (Logarska dolina 2024), which has also caused some disagreements between the local community and the municipality.

The Logar Valley Landscape Park comprises of 104 natural heritage units and 55 cultural heritage units, one of which is recognised as a cultural monument of national importance. However, the valley itself is also protected as a cultural landscape, and it then comes as no surprise that the Logar Valley is renowned both nationally and internationally for its “unspoiled” and fragile Alpine beauty, where a visitor seeking a calm getaway can find a picturesque retreat. The ways in which sustainability is understood in Solčavsko are thus strongly marked by the regimes and regulations of the Logar Valley Landscape Park and its popularity as a tourist destination.

As has been thoroughly described by Clarke (2007: 32–35), the main economic drivers in the region shifted from farming to forestry in the 1950s and later to tourism. Tourism became important in the beginning of the 20th century, and in 2007 reportedly already held a 35% share in the regional economy (Clarke 2007: 18). The economic role of tourism and hospitality in the Logar Valley is also historically attested; for example, Drago Meze writes of the “modest earnings” (1963: 225) farms in the Logar Valley made from tourism in the summer months. In recent years, Solčavsko has increasingly been presenting itself as a tourist destination in sustainable contexts that seemingly legitimise its tourism development. This resonates with the broader observations of Amanda Stronza, who emphasized that “[i]n the past decade or so, the tourism industry has taken major shifts toward goals of economic and ecological sustainability, local participation, and environmental education” (Stronza 2001: 263).

Slapnik and Bogataj (2016) noted that one of the first milestones of “sustainable development” was set with the establishment of the aforementioned landscape park in 1987, which preceded numerous certificates and awards. For example, the CIPRA International was awarded to the management of Nature Park Logarska dolina in 2005; the European Commission recognised Solčavsko as a European Destination of Excellence in 2009; Center Rinka (a multipurpose centre for sustainable development) was awarded the Golden Pencil in 2011, Plečnik’s Medal in 2012 and the 3rd prize in the Constructive Alps competition in 2013; the Municipality of Solčavsko received the “Golden Stone” Award in 2012; the Logar Valley–Solčavsko destination was awarded the golden label Slovenia Green Destination 2020, and in 2019 and 2020, it was listed among the Top 100 sustainable destinations. The perception of the region as being particularly sustainable is highlighted by different actors, while the labels and awards are understood as external and official “proof” of their endeavours which, as we will show, interrelate with multiple temporalities, economic sectors and even with what Slapnik and Bogataj call “moral cores”:

The case of the Alpine region Solčavsko demonstrates how a commitment to nature and tradition as the moral core, and the alignment of the local population under common goals, released the sustainable development potential of an entire region. (Slapnik and Bogataj 2016: 89)

When we talked to different tourism providers in the Logar Valley, from the tourist farm and guest house to the mountain hut and medium-sized hotel, about how they see sustainability, the discussion soon shifted from abstract talk to more practical or seemingly mundane topics closely related to their everyday life and tasks they need to carry out within their sector. We grouped the various topics that predominated in all the conversations into four sets and consequently identified four thematic clusters, namely food practices, the temporalities of tourism, transportation, and general environmental concerns. They form the empirical core of this article. With the ethnographic examples from each of these clusters, we aim to show how this often abstract, trendy or seemingly global “sustainability rhetoric” (Knežević Hočevar 2018: 28) materialises and is translated in a local setting, and how they are understood as embedded in already existing social practices and cultural values.

It is not our intention to define what sustainability in the Logar Valley *is*, to discuss whether the practices and views of the tourism providers *are* sustainable, or to evaluate them in any (moral, academic, ecological or social) sense, but rather to examine *how* the main tourist actors in the valley talk about sustainability, which topics they perceive as falling into the category of sustainability, and which other concepts emerged in their narratives as connected to sustainability issues. Our entry point is therefore similar to Elena Apostoli Cappello's, who approached sustainability “as a relational category and a bargaining ground, the meaning of which changes depending on who is claiming it and why” and not as a “disembodied, ahistorical and apolitical condition” (Apostoli Cappello 2023: 4).

During the conversations, it quickly became evident that a more or less implicit sense of fragility underlies the interlocutors' perceptions of sustainability (see also Apostoli Cappello 2023: 6–8). What is more, the perceived fragility of both the environment and the community plays an important role in generating and maintaining the practices and values related to sustainability. In his analysis of the care for the landscape in the broader region of Solčavsko, Bajič argues that when we talk about fragility, “we are dealing with a specific relationship” (2023: 118). He shows that

[i]n this relationship, the landscape is ‘automatically’ assumed to be fragile, i.e., dependent on the (appropriate) activity of the caretaker, who is also dependent on its vitality. Fragility, in other words, functions as an aesthetic category, i.e., a blend of specific perceptions and discourses. (Bajič 2023: 118)

In our case, this relationship predominantly involves the local actors, who more or less directly understand themselves to be the guardians, caretakers or upholders of the “natural” environment and landscape, the local practices and skills, the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the area (cf. Bajič and Zavratnik 2022), and as individuals who, in short, have the knowledge to maintain and balance the various, often multispecies relations. Even though the examples (or relationships) in the paragraphs below explicitly address sustainability, they often implicitly bring forth the idea (and the moral obligation) of fragility as

well. Furthermore, the terms of tradition, locality, and heritage were often conceptually or semiotically merged with sustainability, as will be explained with examples in subsequent sections, where we will present the four thematic clusters mentioned above. Before turning to these, the words of one interlocutor aptly summarise the importance of observing the talk of sustainability not as separated but as dynamically blended with the other terms:

For me, sustainability in this house means first and foremost working together or relying on tradition, in the sense of both cultural and natural heritage. Everything we do is somehow connected to the intangible cultural heritage as well as tangible cultural heritage. And the natural heritage. First and foremost, this notion of sustainability embeds the concept of tradition. And what I find particularly important is that we value the work of the locals. The knowledge of the locals.

FOOD PRACTICES

All of the main tourism service providers in the Logar Valley offer at least some food on their premises, and most of them place great emphasis on it, highlighting their cuisine on their websites, social media and *in situ*. But the question of food is not only part of the classic repertoire of tourism – it serves as one of the key elements through which they think and portray their sustainable orientation. One of the first things all of them mentioned when we brought up the topic of sustainability was the local cuisine and the food they offer in their establishments. Even before we had explicitly asked about sustainability, one interlocutor, a young woman who with her partner runs a mountain hut that offers accommodation and food, pointed this out:

When it comes to sustainability, our main focus is on food. We really cook local, and fresh and homemade food. Even if there's less [choice]. I mean, even if we don't have six pages of different choices.

The ingredients or the food products they serve in all their meals should come from local sources, ideally from the nearby farmers. The recipes and the preparation techniques should be local, often deriving from family traditions of how to make, for example, *štruklji*, *žlikrofi* or *savinjski želodec*, to name a few “famous” ones. When talking about food, our interlocutors framed their understanding of sustainability with concepts such as “local” and “traditional”, which we can understand through the “practices of locality” (Grasseni 2009).

This corresponds with the way they present themselves on their official channels. On their website, the mountain hut Logarski kot states: “Our menus are based on traditional cuisine and locally produced ingredients” (Logarski kot 2024). Similarly, the website of the Ojstrica House reads:

In a natural setting, Ojstrica House offers you a unique culinary experience, with a focus on traditional cuisine from the region and seasonal dishes, mostly made with locally produced ingredients. [...] Our menu changes seasonally, as we feel it is important to be able to support local farmers and producers. (Hiša Ojstrica 2024)



Photo 2: A menu offering "typical" Slovenian food. Ana Svetel, Logar Valley, February 2024.

In the conversations, the terms "local" or "home-made" were often used synonymously with "sustainable", and had an undoubtedly positive connotation. Many interlocutors also showed us the menus to illustrate their claims.

The ideas that the tourism providers act as responsible and sustainable actors within the community are expressed through the claims that they buy products from farmers in the region (dairy products, jams, meat, etc.), and therefore support the local agriculture and contribute to the economic sustainability of the area. Additionally, by offering "traditional" dishes, they maintain the image of an Alpine destination with its own culinary specifics.

Through this prism we can better understand the view, which was explicitly expressed by one tourism provider, namely that once in the Logar Valley, "one cannot eat *Wiener schnitzel*". The idea that certain foods belong in the valley and others do not was present among all the interlocutors, even though the category of what food was "appropriate" differed slightly. The mountain huts and the farm stays that primarily target hikers and mountaineers emphasize simpler dishes such as stews, thick soups and strudels, while the more luxurious Hotel Plesnik offers "a superb four-course dinner" (Hotel Plesnik 2024). But this culinary experience is still described through the lens of locality: "The authenticity of the flavors and the connection to the local environment can be felt on every plate" (Hotel Plesnik 2024).

Regardless of the type and category of the tourism provider, the menus and the web descriptions thus often visually and textually reflect what we have termed *Alpine food domesticity*. This implicitly sustains the local farmers and their agricultural traditions, which in turn maintain the picturesque, tranquil scenery of the Logar Valley and the surrounding

areas, with the cattle grazing in the meadows around the farms or the mountain pastures during the summer months.

The questions about the products that are not local or home-made were answered with more reluctance. After some thought, the interlocutors mentioned mostly fruits and some vegetables that do not grow (or are not produced in large quantities) in the Solčavsko region. What we identified as a pattern was that the interlocutors tended to put the local culinary products they offer in the spotlight of their narrative, only mentioning the non-local ingredients or foods if directly asked about them – and even then, their explanations were rather vague or unclear. When we asked one interlocutor about her occasional shopping trips to the nearby Austrian town where she buys a significant proportion of foodstuffs for breakfasts, a habit we knew about from our previous fieldwork in the region, she visibly became reluctant to talk about it. The very same routine she had openly described to us on previous occasions, when our research topic was not sustainability, suddenly became a topic to avoid. This ethnographic dissonance shows that sustainability functions as a moral category, and its value-based imperatives necessarily influence ethnographic conversations. Long-term ethnography and understanding of the wider social circumstances are therefore necessary to contextualise the “sustainability talk” or spot any inconsistencies.

Many tourism providers pointed out that the food they offer is what the visitors expect. This kind of “locavore demand” (Apostoli Cappello 2023: 3) therefore presumes a relationship between the tourist, tourism service provider, and the environment, which seems greatly harmonious, since both the tourist and the provider value the same local culinary experience which presumably leads to the sustainability of the “natural” environment and the local economy. This kind of sustainability-induced supply and demand dynamic is evident in the words of one interlocutor:

... and most visitors come because they're interested in the local cuisine. They immediately ask if it's homemade – from sour milk to *sirnek* [a local cheese speciality] and other specialities from Solčava, such as *savinjski želodec* [a local meat product]. Quite a few visitors come here especially for this reason. Of course, there is also the classic crowd of those who just want to eat schnitzel and fries, but most people who come with the purpose of exploring the valley are interested in these things. We, personally, also direct them to the farms. They want to know where the cheese comes from, because it's good. I give them a contact and send them to these farms. The Solčava panoramic road, the Klemenšek farm and so on. We're connected with the farmers and try to promote each other as much as possible, and in this way, the guests can get the most out of their experience. You offer them the best product you can, and why wouldn't you? This is especially true for foreign tourists. Foreign tourists mainly want local products. *Žlinkrofi* [dumplings], for example, are something that everyone wants to try. And then there are traditional mountain dishes like *jota* [a thick stew]. They really have a desire for local dishes. Hikers in particular know this, and it's part of their culture and their purpose in coming here, from *ričet* to jota, because these are dishes that we don't usually cook at home. Foreigners, yes, foreigners specifically ask, 'Is this local?' And I tell them, yes, the meat in the goulash comes from Robanov kot. They really appreciate it and think it's great that they can see where the cows graze. It's particularly interesting for foreigners that they can literally visit the farm if they want to. They find it really fascinating. If you come from a big city, it's quite a 'wow' moment when you realise that this is even possible.

However, the selection of dishes and food products offered at the tourist accommodations in the valley was not a “spontaneous” process or a “natural” fact, but a process of reinventing the local food (cf. Grasseni 2017). One interlocutor recalls the decisions that were made when she started to offer meals in the mountain wooden hut (which was previously a summer home for shepherds) in the beginning of the 1990s:

When I started, I remember that Gusti Lenar was the director at the time. And when I started working, he said, ‘Here, we’ll have only local dishes: žganci, mushroom soup, and such.’ But I said, ‘Who’s going to eat žganci? No one’s going to eat that.’ And he said, ‘Yes, yes, these kinds of things belong here, and that’s what we’ll have.’ It seemed really silly to me. I thought no one would eat it, because even at home we didn’t eat that much of it. But then I saw that he was absolutely right. People really seek this out.

THE TEMPORALITIES OF TOURISM

The second thematic cluster we recognised as being framed through the lens of sustainability was related to the various rhythms of tourism. Our interlocutors, as well as municipal strategies and visions, emphasized that they want to avoid mass tourism and prefer to offer more boutique or tailored experiences, and therefore focus on niche programmes that stem from the “fragile” and “limited” but at the same time “precious” and “unique” environment of the Kamnik-Savinja Alps. Such examples are the anti-burnout and anti-stress packages, the Pure Power of Nature package or the detox programmes offered by Hotel Plesnik and Na razpotju. The underlying premise is that the Logar Valley can function as a location where time “slows down” or even “stops”, and where visitors can take a break from their fast, stressful, and urban everyday lives. While many tourism providers implicitly present the location in this framework, some talk about this temporal aspect directly:

This place has a certain peculiarity. On the one hand, it’s great, and everyone who comes up here, the moment they step out, it feels like time stops. Have you felt that? It’s amazing, you can’t believe it.

The same interlocutor stresses that the valley is also a suitable location to “log-out” from everyday routines:

Otherwise, what we’ve noticed is that very often people come here alone. Either a woman by herself or a man by himself. But basically, whoever you talk to, they all want to be alone because they just can’t [cope] anymore. They can’t stand their phone, their coworkers, their friends – they just want peace. When it all gets to be too much.

Similar temporal sentiments can also be found in hiking and mountaineering types of tourism, which had already started in Solčavsko in the 19th century – the Alps represented not only one of the main national symbols but also the romantic idea of refuge and almost mythical otherness (Mikša 2021; Peternel 2020; Šaver 2005).

But the temporalities of tourism are not related only to affective and symbolic orien-

tations towards “slower” or more “meaningful” time. The following words from a tourism service provider who offers wellness programmes as well as accommodation show that the temporalities they refer to also include more practical goals:

When we renovated the wellness centre, we were looking for a programme that would fit in here so that guests would come regardless of whether it's raining, snowing or windy. And so they would stay for several days.



Photo 3: Promotion of anti-burnout and anti-stress packages. Hotel Plesnik Website. December 2024.

They are also closely connected to the endeavours to lower the numbers of daily visitors and prolong the average length of stay to at least a few days. One-day visitors are often perceived as a burden for the valley, sometimes referred to as “crowds” that flood the landscape park and throw it “out of balance”. At the same time, in the eyes of the tourism providers, they are not the visitors that sustain the local economy since they tend not to purchase the local products or other tourist offerings. The “issue” with one-day visitors is strongly seasonally framed – they are perceived as a problem especially during the high season, which peaks on the weekends in July and August. In our previous ethnographic research in the valley, we have never spotted any negative comments about the daily visitors who come to the valley in the winter for cross-country skiing, let alone the visitors that arrive during the low seasons of late autumn or early spring.

Many interlocutors emphasized the seasonal imbalance of the numbers of visitors, with a relatively short high season from June to September, when, especially during the weekends and on 15 August, which is a national holiday in Slovenia, the valley becomes simply “too full” and therefore “out of balance”, which leads to perceptions of unsustainability. This unsustainability usually materialises in problems related to infrastructure and

transportation, which we will address in the next section. The challenges the community and the environment face when dealing with sudden influxes of tourists are associated with increased traffic and overcrowding. Many interlocutors expressed their goal to extend the tourist season and to avoid growth in numbers during the peak season: “Our aim is not to have more tourists here. The aim is to prolong the season.”

The temporal unsustainability as framed by the tourism service providers is closely connected to fragility. The sense of the valley’s fragility was explicitly addressed when we talked about the peak tourist periods, especially the warm and sunny summer weekends, when the valley turns into a place with too many people and too many cars. They are said to strain the resources of the valley and to pose a threat to the fragile balance in both the “natural” and “social” sense. The level of fragility thus differs throughout the year. The valley was perceived as much more fragile during certain periods: during these “special” times, both the environment and the local community are seen as particularly fragile.

TRAVELLING TO/IN THE VALLEY

Closely related to the seasonal rhythms we addressed in the previous section is the issue of transport. Germ, Krampl and Krašovic argue that the locals “are trying to find ways to limit the crowds of cars, which are a daily burden to the environment, while at the same time wanting to keep the valley a popular tourist destination” (Germ, Krampl and Krašovic 2022: 32).

It is precisely this balancing that seemed to be the main concern when the interlocutors brought up the (un)sustainable transport realities in the valley. Since 2020, when we began research in the area, the municipality officers, farmers, tourism providers and other actors have been mentioning different yet related options to us on how to address the issue of transport in the area. Some advocate for expanding the car park in front of the entrance to the valley and establishing various “green” and public transportation options at the entrance, such as bikes, e-bikes, and a bus that would drive into the valley; similar P&R regimes are found in Bohinj, another popular Alpine region in Slovenia (Bajuk Senčar 2017). Another idea is to limit the number of vehicles entering the valley per day, which would “relieve” the valley and prevent overcrowding. However, this would limit the profits of the tourism providers and potentially transfer the overcrowding to other popular locations in the municipality, such as Roban and Matk Cirque and the Solčava Panoramic Road.

One interlocutor that strongly supports the idea of encouraging visitors to park at the entrance of the valley pointed out that she would rather drive the visitors back to the car park if they get caught by bad weather or lose track of time:

We’re also like that personally — if someone is late and it’s dark or if they get caught in a storm, we’re prepared to drive them to the start of the valley so they don’t have to walk. Just to reduce the number of cars so it doesn’t get too crowded.

Another interlocutor sometimes drives her guests to the steepest part of the panoramic road and drops them off at a point from where they can make a round trip back to the

valley by bicycle. This practice enables the visitors that might not be able to ride their bikes for the whole road to still experience it on bicycles instead of driving their cars (and stopping at the scenic spots).

Even though the interlocutors embraced the increased cycling in the area, one of them was concerned with the problems the increasingly popular and promoted e-biking can bring:

In the last few years, cycling has increased considerably, especially with electric bikes for riding in the mountains. But we don't have anywhere to set up a proper bike storage facility so it could be locked and guests could bring their own bikes. Because it is forbidden to build anything, we're not allowed to do anything.

After some minutes, the interlocutor returned to the issue again:

This is now something everyone must have, a bicycle parking facility. And we have a real problem. Where should we put them? Because we're not allowed to have such facilities. They don't allow it. But people expect and demand them. Some bikes are worth, I don't know, ten, twenty thousand euros – you can't just leave them outside.

Since the valley is a landscape park and a protected area, it falls under the regulations of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (Slovene: ZVKDS, Zavod za varovanje kulturne dediščine). Tensions between the institute and the conservation policies on the one hand and the aspirations of some of the inhabitants in the area on the other have also been ethnographically recorded in non-tourism contexts (Hazler 2021; Hostnik and Klanšek 2021; Jerkič, Kristan and Mlinarič 2021).

The opinion that the issue of the increasing traffic cannot be addressed only within the landscape park or the municipality but needs to be addressed more broadly by strengthening public transportation in the country with regular bus lines between Solčavsko and Slovenian cities was also expressed. This idea was often underlined with a (nostalgic) reference to the bus line that connected Zagreb and the Logar Valley for some time in Yugoslavia. This reference functions as a (affective) reminder that “back then” public transportation services seemed to work more efficiently.

The perceived remoteness was also sensed among some of our interlocutors. Since the Logar Valley is located higher up in the Savinja valley than the village of Solčavsko, the (few) buses that connect the municipality with the capital or nearby towns (Celje, Velenje) only go to Solčava. The lack of public transportation in the valley is recognised as an issue that affects not only the visitors but also the local population and the workers, as expressed by one interlocutor:

The buses come as far as Solčava, but no further. Our children are at a real disadvantage. They can't take part in activities because my husband and I can't always drive them, because no matter where you go, it takes at least an hour. And that's very unfair. It's a problem, a big problem. Public transport would be used by us, the residents, the tourists and the employees. But nobody can use it because it simply doesn't exist.

However, all these various thoughts and opinions on how to manage the increasing traffic in the valley focus primarily on daily visitors. The car park at the end of the valley, near the Rinka waterfall, was presented to us as the most pressing and spatially unsustainable location, the number of vehicles entering the valley making it the epicentre of the problem. “Everybody’s going crazy to get one photo on Instagram. Everybody wants to get to the Rinka waterfall with a car. And there should be a way to stop this,” pleaded one interlocutor as we were sipping home-made tea in the lobby.

We can see that various modalities are intertwined in the transportation issue: problems with the number of cars and the absence of public transport in the valley are interconnected and the interlocutors see them as one of the key weak points of sustainability. The increasingly popular (electric) biking was presented as (one) part of the solution, but the storage of e-bikes is becoming, as shown above, a growing concern. Another pressing issue, related to the various modes of mobility in the valley, is related to one of the desired modes, namely walking. Considerable parts of the valley belong to one farm and are used as meadows; they are not intended for walking or trespassing. However, in their search for photogenic spots, secluded paths or simply a spot to sit in the grass, some visitors enter the meadows and occasionally get into arguments with the farmer. In many parts of the valley, information boards remind the visitors to stay on the designated paths. But one of the interlocutors nevertheless mentioned the “audacity of people to walk across the meadows.”



Photo 4: Signage at one of the meadows in Logar Valley. Ana Svetel, Logar Valley, July 2023.

In comparison to the first three, the fourth theme of this “materialisation” of sustainability was somehow more elusive. It was related to what we might imagine under the term “environmental sustainability”, often framed within climate change discourse and translated into “care for the environment”. Here, sustainability was perceived as a kind of moral obligation, oriented towards both the past and the future. Ancestors and their environmental practices were often referred to as a form of proto-sustainability, as a mode of sustainable human-environment relations before the word sustainability even existed or became trendy. Let’s look at one example:

The word sustainability, right, it wasn’t worded like that. What I want to say [is] that this action, this mentality, this philosophy has always been performed in the Logar Valley. And lived. But it is a fact that in the last few decades this [word] has started to be used as a kind of niche market [...]. Sometimes people abuse this [word] for commercial purposes. [...] And I would say that this word sustainable development, sustainable progress, sustainable engagement, everything that has to do with sustainability, are just some phrases that are fashionable today. And not just fashionable. This word has simply been found now. Because in the past this wasn’t named.

This idea is present not only among the local tourism service providers, but is also explicitly part of the municipal strategy for sustainable tourism, as is visible from the slogan tourism providers use: “Logar Valley - Solčavsko, a connected, resilient, and balanced mountain community; we proudly build upon the centuries-old tradition of sustainable practices of our ancestors.” Meanwhile, we can read on The Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism website that in the Logar Valley, “sustainability is a centuries’ old tradition” (Slovenia Green 2024).

In the Logar Valley, the sustainability of the present day can therefore be seen as a continuation, and obligation, to preserve and care for what past generations have “given” to the current ones. Farmers, including the ones involved in agrotourism, are perceived as guardians – both of the community and of the environment.² Of course, they, too, perceive themselves as guardians. In this sense, the valley and its people have, in a certain respect, an atemporal existence, a metaphysical dimension of social and environmental infinitude and changelessness (see also Bajič 2023).

Another side of this temporality of sustainability is oriented towards descendants. One interlocutor pointed out: “Sustainability is connected to the mindset that in every decision, you think of 2 or 3 generations ahead.” Her words resonate with Anna Tsing, who evocatively described sustainability as “the dream of passing a livable earth to future generations, human and nonhuman” (Tsing 2017: 51).

However, the conversations also revealed a somehow paradoxical contrast between these perceptions of sustainability, rooted in, so to say, the eternal order of the generations who dwelled, dwell and will dwell in the valley on the one hand, and the pragmatic reality

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For a similar insight regarding specific coastal agricultural regions in Northern Italy, see Apostoli Cappello (2023: 8).

of sustainability labels and certificates on the other. In fact, many of the same tourism service providers who emphasized the almost “metaphysical” drive for sustainability were also very “concrete” and practical when it came to demonstrating their sustainability in a very institutionalised manner. After all, they can attract tourists, especially foreign ones, with visual proof of their sustainability, since the logos of these certificates and labels are usually proudly displayed on their doors, at the reception and on their websites, and might even have a particular aesthetic dimension.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we reframed the concept of sustainability beyond its universalistic and often abstract applications, highlighting the importance of local perceptions and contexts to understand how sustainability materialises in a particular place and time. Using the ethnographic approach, we have shown that the sustainability discourses in the Logar Valley are influenced as much by global or institutionalised development goals and trends as by local histories, cultural backgrounds, and collective representations. We explored sustainability through the practices of tourism providers, as “an idea” where “local originality, creativity, imagination and resourcefulness complement strategic planning” (Anko 2007: 96), not only at the individual but also at the community level. In this article, we explore four themes that make the vague concept more concrete and localised.

The most notable context in which sustainability is discussed, utilised and promoted is connected to food practices. In line with the general growing interest in local gastronomic delicacies or, as Apostoli Cappello puts it, a “locavore demand” (2023: 3), “traditional” and homemade local dishes made from locally sourced ingredients are the predominant materialisation of sustainability. To encompass the broad implications of this aspect, we have coined the term *Alpine food domesticity*, which refers to the most commonly offered (and sought-after) “home-made” local dishes, but also more broadly to the preservation of traditional forms of agriculture and land cultivation – cattle and sheep grazing in the meadows and mountain pastures. Alpine food domesticity implicitly supports local farmers and agricultural traditions, but also the picturesque scenery of the Logar Valley and the surrounding areas and therefore reinforces specific aesthetics and tastes.

The temporality of tourism is another important context in which sustainability is discussed, practised, and displayed. Here we can follow two main temporalities – a balanced and an unbalanced time, eurhythmic and arrhythmic (Lefebvre 2004: 67). Firstly, there is the rhythm of tourism, which refers to the ability of the Logar Valley itself to slow down or even stop time and offer tourists the chance to relax and disconnect from the worries and pace of everyday life. Secondly, at certain times the valley is, in contrast, perceived as being out of balance. This occurs when it is flooded with tourists and cars, and so loses its intrinsic quality of calmness and tranquillity.

Transportation to and within the valley is closely related to the notion of balanced and unbalanced times and to the perception of the valley in terms of remoteness. Different

local ideas, strategies and mechanisms are discussed in relation to the very practical issues locals experience. As in other spheres that were not explicitly discussed in this article (see Jerkič, Kristan and Mlinarič 2021), limitations stemming from cultural and natural heritage protection regimes came to the fore. Due to strict protection regimes that are in some cases perceived as limiting local (sustainable) development, tourism service providers deal with practical obstacles in fulfilling the expectations of modern sustainability-oriented tourists, for example, e-cyclers.

Finally, the local discourse on sustainability is connected to wider environmental aspects. Here, sustainability is often framed in terms of proto-sustainable practices that existed in the valley long before the term “officially” became popular and widespread. In this sense, sustainability is closely connected to concepts of tradition, heritage, local knowledge and family, and is understood as a kind of moral obligation not only to the past (and as respect for ancestral practices) but also to the future, in the sense that the landscape, heritage and way of life must be preserved for future generations, albeit in the environmental sense, the future might itself seem fragile. These views can be illustrated with the words of Marko Slapnik and Nevenka Bogataj (2016) that speak of the moral core of the region and frame it with the wording: “Nature and heritage are not here to be changed, but to change us!” However, despite this metaphysical dimension that the locals claim for themselves, care for the environment also materialises in much more pragmatic aspects such as certifications and quality labels, which also demonstrate the economic importance of sustainable approaches in tourism and can even have – displayed at doors, entrances or reception desks of tourist premises – a specific aesthetic dimension.

In conclusion, local perceptions of sustainability, fragility, and tradition, and especially when understood in the context of tourism, function as closely interlinked emic concepts. They function as a tool or discursive strategy that allows the various actors in Solčavsko to position themselves within the multiplicity of social relations between us and them, past and future, nature and culture, tradition and innovation, good and bad. Similar to Apostoli Cappello’s insights on agricultural practices in Northern Italy, we can see how sustainability can and is also used in discursive contexts “as a resource for negotiating access to resources at the local level” and as a “source of political legitimization” (Apostoli Cappello 2023: 18). They can thus be understood as socially acceptable tools of expressing their interests in a way that makes these interests appear as “objective”, “rational” or “universally valid” truths.

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V prispevku se osredinja na percepcije in materializacije trajnostnosti v Logarski dolini. Z obravnavo izbranih lokalnih turističnih ponudnikov pokaževa, kako se na prvi pogled abstraktna ideja trajnostnosti upomenja na štirih ključnih področjih: v kulinariki in prehranskih vidikih, časovnosti turizma, mobilnostnih praksah ter skrbi za okolje. Trajnostnosti ne razumeva kot analitični koncept, temveč kot emsko kategorijo, prepleteno z lokalnimi predstavami o krhkosti, tradiciji in identiteti. Pri tem pokaževa, da ideje o trajnostnosti lokalni turistični akterji uporabljajo tudi kot (diskurzivno) orodje za izražanje lastnih interesov, ki jih predstavljajo kot objektivne, splošno razširjene in moralno »pravilne« resnice. Etnografska raziskava osvetljuje, kako se globalni in ideološko konotirani koncept trajnostnosti percipira in materializira v družbeno in kulturno specifičnih okoliščinah izbrane alpske turistične destinacije.

Med štirimi ključnimi področji članek izpostavlja ideje o lokalni kulinariki in prehranskih tradicijah, ki jih turistični akterji tesno povezujejo s trajnostnostjo. Hrana, pripravljena iz lokalnih sestavin, naj bi odražala ohranjanje tradicije, podpirala lokalne kmetovalce in prispevala k trajnostnemu razvoju regije, hkrati pa naj bi ustrezala pričakovanjem gostov. Drugo področje, ki ga opredeliva kot časovne ritme turizma, v ospredje postavlja turistične reprezentacije Logarske doline kot kraja »zaustavitve časa«, vračanja k umirjenosti ter odklopa od hitrega (in digitalno nasičenega) ritma vsakdana, pri tem pa se, paradoksalno, dolina hkrati sooča z izzivi množičnega turizma in gneče v visoki sezoni, kar krni podobo umirjene ali kar »zunajčasovne« alpske idile. Na področju mobilnostnih praks upošteva tako mobilnosti po dolini kot tiste med dolino in okoliškimi lokacijami ter tako javni kot zasebni prevoz, pri čemer turistični akterji mobilnostne prakse obiskovalcev pogosto prepoznavajo kot osrednji primer netrajnostnosti v dolini, saj naj bi množični obiski povečevali pritisk na infrastrukturo in okolje. V prispevku se dotakneva nekaterih morebitnih rešitev, o katerih razpravljajo sogovorniki, kot so uvedba »zelenih« možnosti prevoza in omejitev vstopa vozil v dolino, kar pa odpira vprašanja ekonomske vzdržnosti in dostopnosti. Skrb za okolje se v etnografskih gradivih kaže kot (včasih implicitna) moralna dolžnost, ki temelji na ideji spoštovanja in nadaljevanja okoljskih praks in znanj prednikov, ki naj bi bila trajnostna sama po sebi, ter vzdrževanju tega, s strani prednikov ohranjenega in sedanjim generacijam v skrbstvo zaupanega okolja za zanamce. Hkrati s temi »prototrajnostnimi« in čezgeneracijskimi idejami je trajnostnost povezana tudi s kulturno dediščino ter kulturno- in naravovarstvenimi vidiki Krajinskega parka Logarska dolina ter institucionalizirana s številnimi certifikati in nagradami, ki naj bi privabljele turiste in krepile podobo regije kot trajnostne destinacije.

Različna lokalna razumevanja pojmov trajnostnosti in krhkosti ter načini njihove (diskurzivne) uporabe pomagajo vzpostavljati dinamična razmerja med različnimi akterji in interesi na področju turizma v Logarski dolini. Percepcije trajnostnosti so torej neizogibno umeščene v kulturno in družbeno specifične okoliščine ter zato etnografsko relevantne.