



Travelling Voices

Stories of rural regeneration



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The Brufjell Caves, a popular hiking destination in Flekkefjord, Norway, with a view of the Milky Way. The series of caves were worn out of solid rock by the sea around 7000 years ago.

photo by Tommy Olsen

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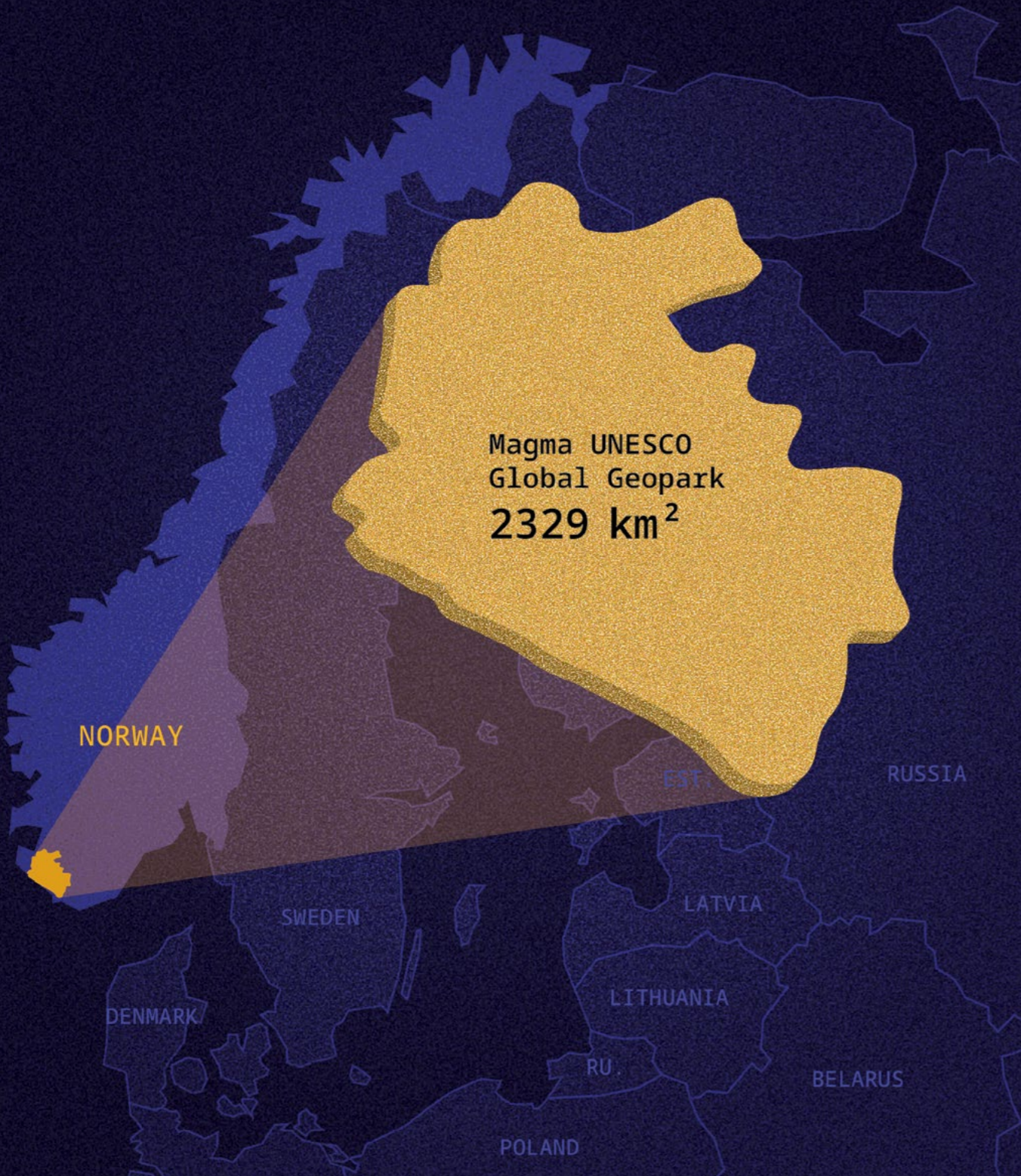
People have always been curious. Although several hundreds of years ago, there were no morning papers to appease the hunger for news nor social media to gather the latest gossip, throughout the middle ages there were travelling messengers. These messengers were troubadours, minstrels, or bards, who roamed from town to town, village to village, collecting and spreading stories and news all around Europe. What kind of news? About noble or grand things, definitely, about battles, tragedies, quarrels between kings and princes, but there were also interesting stories of everyday life of ordinary people, many worth telling.

Today, what would a modern-day troubadour hear and see travelling through countries and regions, towns and villages? He or she would see all of the challenges of our time: from the unpredictable weather, forest fires, floods, to health crises, social issues, financial struggle and all of the other negative things we don't like to welcome in our life. But still, the stories that would peak their attention would probably be about personal victories, small but heart-warming achievements, about events we are proud of or bond us together.

In this book we invite you to visit six rural locations in (and beyond) Europe. Some places are relatively small: a town in central Italy or a castle in Slovenia. Others are big, such as the Geo-Naturepark Bergstraße-Odenwald (UNESCO Global Geopark) in Germany covering dozens of municipalities. But there is one thing they all have in common. Despite the difficulties faced by these rural communities, they all believe in regeneration. That they can build on their treasures, their histories and heritage to better deal with challenges, and strengthen their communities for their own benefit and for the visitors they would like to attract.

This book will send you on a journey through the six locations, wherein you will encounter some interesting or inspiring stories, and maybe, at the end, you will turn into a "digital troubadour" and will also share these stories with others.

FROM



Magma UNESCO Global Geopark

If we compare the map of Norway, let's say, to a huge drop of water, right at the bottom of the drop you can find the Magma UNESCO Global Geopark - we start our journey here, in northern Europe. 900 million years ago this entire area was a huge magma chamber deep inside the earth's interior. Many exciting geological processes have taken place here and the result is wild and untouched nature with unique minerals and rocks. Water also plays a major role in the Geopark: many lakes, streams, rivers and waterfalls carve through the landscape creating a varied and appealing area of natural beauty, while the North Sea is ravaging the steep coastal cliffs.

The Geopark covers an area of five municipalities with over 30,000 inhabitants. Since the Geopark was established in 2008, it has been actively working in the field of community engagement and valorisation of cultural and natural heritage through tourism activities and educational programmes. Their aim is to strengthen the awareness of locals about the potential of the heritage in their own area, to make them proud of living here, and to support them in developing new initiatives.

WORLD
NORWAY



Biking through dazzling scenery of Flekkefjord.

We ♥ railroads

People around the southern peak of Norway definitely respect the old objects and machines which once served them well. As it is clearly visible, they especially have an affection toward, well - railroads. As a first example to prove this interesting fact, you can visit the remains of the Blafjell Railway. This railway never carried passengers, but ilmenite instead, a titanium-iron oxide mineral from the nearby Blafjell mines, to the closest port. The ore was then shipped to England to produce a high quality steel that was very strong and resistant to corrosion. The railway tracks were dismantled and removed when mining ceased around 1875, but a few kilometers long part of the old track is still well preserved, offering a very pleasant trip for hikers, bikers or dog walkers. You can pass through an old rail bridge which is still holding strong after 130 years, thanks to steel made from the local ilmenite. But what made this railroad really special is the way it worked: at one part of it the wagons travelled down toward the fjord using only the force of gravity - then the empty wagons were pulled back uphill by horses.

Just a few kilometers from the Blafjell mines there is a very different attraction, a 100-year-old trolley track at Jøssingfjord. Although the purpose was the same, to transport ore, this relatively short track won't offer you a pleasant walk at all - but a literally breathtaking (and rewarding) hike to the summit. Through the efforts of dozens of volunteers and more than 500 hours of hard work, it is now possible

that anybody who is adventurous enough can climb to the top, using the hundreds of steep steps that were placed close to the rails. Based on old drawings, the whole construction was renovated: from the 500 original sleepers, 180 have been replaced along with the entire footpath and railing.

When the Flekkefjord line was closed down after 80 years of operation, the old railroad was sentenced to death. The station buildings were demolished and the tracks were only saved because of the persistent work of the volunteer organisation, Friends of Flekkefjordbanen. Now biking on the old train tracks using a "draisine" (a pedal-powered tandem railbike) is real fun. You enjoy not just the dazzling scenery but even go through 17 dark (pitchblack and chilly) tunnels. One of them is 1.2 kilometers long, and once was the longest tunnel in Norway. There is no light in the tunnels so you will definitely need a headlamp. The Friends of Flekkefjordbanen choose the slogan 'cultural salvation through active use' - the thousands of groups, friends and whole families, who embark on this nearly three hours long adventure are the clear evidence that the organisation's mission has been successful.

“ *the thousands of groups who embark on this nearly three hours long adventure are the clear evidence that the organisation's mission was successful* ”



“Danseplattung” with a fantastic view and incredible acoustics in Jøssingfjord.

2 The dancing platform

Way beyond the end of Jøssingfjord, past the old hydropower station, over the winding road, high in the mountains there was once a simple wooden stage: a dancing platform. You may think, so far away from everything, this is probably not the best location for such a venue. It was a plain stage with a simple wooden railing. But if you know the history of the area everything makes much more sense. In the beginning of the 20th century, Jøssingfjord played an important role in Norwegian industry. It had enough raw materials, hydropower, and also good port conditions. There was a chamotte factory, making tiles, bricks and pipes from clay, as well as a timber factory, and big smelters producing zinc and steel. To feed the industry three power stations were in operation at the same time. To run the factories, many engineers and workers came to Jøssingfjord, mostly young men, and more than a hundred of them came from abroad. And what did these young men want after a long work shift? That’s right: fun. Normally, they had to travel long distances to enjoy the kind of entertainment they were craving for (music, dance and socialising), so they built their own dancing platform instead. Since the town had not only electricity and telephone lines, but a regular boat connection with Flekkefjord too, locals from all around the fjord could also come to listen and dance to the sweet melodies. Whoever couldn’t come by boat, walked over the hills. These melodies were offered by an accordion and a guitar player. We can’t be sure what

was the bigger pleasure for the dancers: to enjoy the incredible acoustics framed with the fantastic view over the mighty fjord landscape - or enjoy the proximity of the opposite sex. But we can have a careful guess.

Decades passed and the only thing that reminded the hikers of the glorious past was the rock foundation of the platform. But those at Magma Geopark thought that the platform could be a perfect outdoor spot for the community. So they turned to one of the oldest men in Jøssingfjord, Wilhelm Dydland, who remembered the platform from his childhood, and helped them to recreate it. First volunteers came and cleared the area from shrubs. Then they carried the wooden materials, and with the help of a professional carpenter in a few days they finished the work. One of the most magical moments of the newly built stage was a classical concert when the audience had the pleasure to listen to the ethereal sounds of a flute and a cello - a special music, inspired by this spectacular nature. Unfortunately, it’s past tense, because in 2019 a huge forest fire devoured the platform. But there are plans to rebuild it again, and to fill the edge of the fjord with music, dance and fun.

“ *the audience had the pleasure to listen to the ethereal sounds of a flute and a cello - a special music, inspired by this spectacular nature* ”



Egersund Church, the starting point of the Kystpilegrimsleia

Young pilgrims

“ *the more than 1000 kilometer long journey starts at the Egersund Church and runs along the west coast of Norway* ”

Different trails in Norway are stretching toward the city of Trondheim, directing pilgrims since the Middle Ages to the Nidaros Cathedral, where the earthly remains of Saint Olav can be found. Just one year after Olav, the first “real” king of Norway, died in 1030 he was already made a saint - and for the next five hundred years his tomb became one of the most popular pilgrimage destinations across northern Europe. When the reformation reached the country, in 1537 the pilgrimage was banned and during the next few hundred years the memory of the trails were almost completely forgotten. Now the St. Olav Ways are the largest Northern European project to bring pilgrimage back to life as a cultural heritage asset.

Seven main pilgrimage routes to Nidaros have evolved over the centuries - probably one of the most scenic of them is the Kystpilegrimsleia, the coastal pilgrimage path. The more than 1000 kilometer long journey starts at the Egersund Church and runs along the west coast of Norway, through mountains, fjords, islands and reefs. This is not a continuous marked hike, so most people combine different means of transport (boat, bicycle, and even bus) to get to a new key location. However the very first part of the road is a 7 kilometer long continuous gravel path.

This trail follows (not surprisingly) an old railroad track with impressive stone walls, rock cuts, a tunnel and an old, pretty station building. It took many years of planning and preparation for the municipality to make the whole 7 kilometers suitable for walking, biking - and for starting a long pilgrimage. But there is no need to be a pilgrim to walk along this beautiful trail. Every year hundreds of school kids are exercising their leg muscles here - and their brains too. Using an educational app, they stop at certain points of the road to listen to interesting stories or answer questions. They can imagine, for example, what it could look like when the royal fleet of King Knut The Great arrived to Egersund, with hundreds of ships flooding the harbour, as it was described in different ancient stories. They can hear about geological curiosities too: about 930 million years old crystallized magma or about crescent shaped marks on rocks, which indicate, like arrows, which way the ice has moved some thousands of years ago. If you think about it, every journey to gain knowledge is also a kind of pilgrimage, whether you do it alone or together with your school friends.



A bell stone at Skåra, Egersund

Singing rocks

4

Don't be surprised if you see a lonely walker in Magma Geopark, stopping at a solitary rock, hitting it with another small stone, murmuring a few words - then leaving the spot. The rock is probably a phonolite ("sounding stone"), or as people call it here a bell stone, a very interesting, and quite rare geological phenomenon. If you hit a phonolite with another stone it makes a long, clear metallic sound, as if it would be a church or barn bell. From Sudan to Vietnam, sounding stones can be found in different parts of the world. In Norway, especially in the Geopark, you can also find a few.

The interesting thing about these stones is that no one knows for sure what causes them to make sounds. From their locations to the shape, several factors can play a role, but probably the most significant one is the structure of the stone. The key is that it must have a very high density without cracks or other weaknesses. But this poses the next question: what has created its particular structure? The suspect is a thick, sometimes three kilometers wide ice layer, which during the ice age could change the microstructure of solid rocks and loose boulders.

Magma Geopark collaborated with the music archaeologist Gjermund Kolltveit to build a

website where they can register the Norwegian bell stones. The information they collect is not just about the geology of these stones, but also about the cultural history surrounding them. Certain traditions exist about what makes these boulders bell. There are several stories about breaking the bell stones in order to find the precious metals, gold or silver in them, which caused the sound. One legend is about an angry giant who threw a bell stone to a bridal party, leaving the marks of his fingers on the rock's surface. Other stories are about elves, living inside the stone. During the Bronze Age the bell stones were probably used in certain rituals as indicated by the bowl pits, which are small round carved depressions found in some stones. In the olden days, some people even hit these stones in order to keep the creatures of the underground at bay. Others struck them to wish for happiness, or travellers for safer journeys. Some people, even nowadays, like to hit the bell stones just for the sake of their celestial sound - but if you happen to be around one, just hit them hard and feel free to murmur a wish for your future.

“ *some people hit these stones in order to keep the creatures of the underground at bay* ”



A hidden head (Photo by Christian Sunde)

107 heads

One mysterious head is watching the fjord. Another one is looking at a mountain peak. One head is guarding a dam, one is keeping an eye on an old farm. Other heads are gazing at the passersby in the town, others are admiring the beauty of the countryside. There are 107 of them - all hidden. Although each of these heads are different, they are all made of iron, and are truly small - a little bit bigger than an almond. They are placed in and around Flekkefjord, a charming coastal town, and everybody in and around the town is excitedly searching for them.

Sculptor Christian Sunde started to make and then hide small heads years ago, and using Instagram invited his audience to find them. These heads can be found all around Norway, even abroad. He has been sculpting heads for quite a long time: and in the past, he made monumental heads for public places. The heads, with their simple but powerful shape and beautifully internal illumination, gently attract attention in our easily distracted world. But with his small iron creatures he had a different aim. He placed some heads in familiar places to give them new focus, or to make people discover these places again. He also chose other, not that well-known locations, inspiring

“ *he also chose others, not that well-known locations, inspiring everybody, from young to old, for an adventure, to find new places, new connections*

everybody, from young to old, for an adventure, to find new places, new connections. But the heads are not just connecting and bonding people with their environment - they also bring art, with its deep, peculiar meaning, much closer to them. Before he molds the heads, first he models them in plasticine with small sticks and spatulas through a meticulous and demanding process. The final part of the process is looking for the best location. Christian usually goes for trips with many different heads in his pocket so he can choose on the spot which heads would be the best fit for the special environment.

Recently his hometown, Flekkefjord, asked him for a collaboration. The municipality was looking for an art project which could be unifying for people, but also can stand as a memory of the very special year of 2020. There are exactly 107 small iron heads placed in and around Flekkefjord, which is exactly the number of babies born in the town during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The iron symbolizes strength - but it also rusts, showing that time passes. Finding the hidden heads, the joyful people can also be hopeful, a reminder that bad times will pass, and will be followed by good ones.



Sheeps taking care of nature in Magma UNESCO Global Geopark.

photo by
Eva Pettersen Andreassen

The old trolley track at Jøssingfjord.

photo by
Bjørn André Hagen



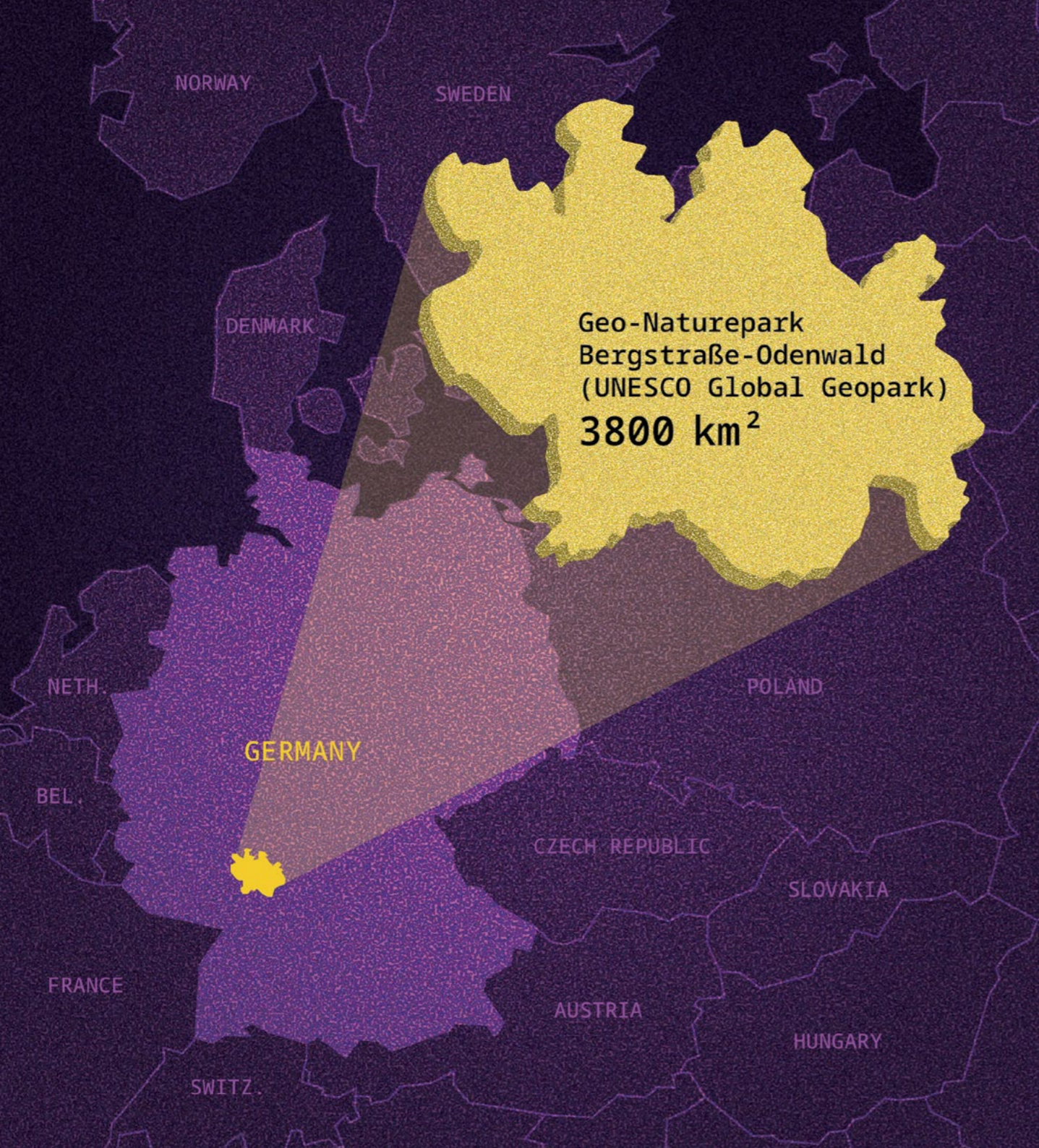
At Vinjakula looking over the gneissic landscape with a view to impressive mountains and steep valleys.

photo by
Åse Hestnes

Climbing on Trollpikken a post glacier phenomenon. The bedrock here is the magmatic rock Anorthosite that you only find in a few places on Earth and on the surface of the Moon.

photo by
Anna Omdal





Geo-Naturepark Bergstraße-Odenwald (UNESCO Global Geopark)

Our second stop is Geo-Naturepark in southwest Germany, a relatively large area covering 105 municipalities. The Geo-Naturepark's motto: *"Between granite and sandstone – continents on the move"* recalls the time more than 300 million years ago when two supercontinents collided forming plutonic rocks, as well as other geological times when sandstones and mudstones were deposited in rivers and lakes. 500 million years of fascinating geology has created a diverse landscape, from agricultural land to deep forests, crowned with a rich cultural history.

As the territory is situated between two main regions, it plays an important role as a recreational area and can be easily reached by millions of people. The Geo-Naturepark offers educational programmes, field trips and outdoor school activities enjoying the help of their 25 rangers and nearly 200 on-site guides. Following a holistic approach, the Geo-Naturepark encourages getting into contact with nature through hands-on activities and helps people to experience the healing power of forest, meadow and water through outdoor activities.

GREEN



The prune of Lützelsachsen

Fruit fairytale

Just imagine that it's springtime, you are visiting your friends in the neighbouring village by bike, and on the side of the field road there are fruit trees growing freely. You can see (and smell) beautiful apple, pear, sweet cherry, plum or walnut trees. It's like being in a fairytale. This is how orchard meadows look in the Geo-Naturepark - and it's been the same for hundreds of years. Beyond their beauty, these trees have a great value. They protect soil from erosion, acting as wind and heat shield, and they are also important habitats for birds and insects. The old, robust fruit varieties of the meadow orchard, developed over centuries according to local conditions, represent a great genetic potential - they are particularly resilient against diseases and pests, as well as climate change.

Despite all of the good services they provide, orchard meadows are slowly disappearing. Since the 15th century, fruit trees have been planted in the open countryside. However, expanding road networks and intensifying agriculture seem like a certain death sentence for the orchard meadows, a natural (or unnatural) force almost impossible to fight. Still, any action

is worth taking. This is what Geo-Naturepark thought in 2016 when they started the Fruit Tree of the Year initiative. Every year a fruit variety is awarded this distinction, and saplings are sent to more than 100 partner communities upon request.

One of the lucky nominees was the *Mirabelle von nancy*, a very aromatic (and eye-catching) plum, which even has its own festival in Obernburg. In 2021, the Geo-Naturpark nominated the Lützelsachser Frühzwetsche: the Prune of Lützelsachsen as the Fruit Tree of the Year. This plum was accidentally found (and then consciously bred) in 1914, and since this variety bears ripe fruit very early in the season, it helped save Lützelsachsen from hunger after the First World War. Along with the Fruit Tree of the Year award, through this initiative Geo-Naturepark encourages locals to buy regional fruit products, to plant local varieties, and harvest and process their own fruits.

“ since this variety bears ripe fruit very early in the season, it helped save Lützelsachsen from hunger after the First World War



Myotis myotis, the greater mouse-eared bat.

Bats in the mine

There is a new excitement among the young visitors of the Marie Pit, an at least 500 years old mine in Weinheim. Descending into the mine's old tunnels is always an adventure itself. The mine impressively demonstrates the change in mining techniques from medieval mining to shooting with black powder in the 18th century. The deeper levels were once flooded, and here you can see numerous traces of old tools and a shaft carpentry which were preserved well in the water. Touching minerals or observing them with microscopes while listening to stories about the treasures of the mountain are also exciting things to do, but the kids have new favourites nowadays: bats.

The *Myotis myotis*, the greater mouse-eared bat, an inhabitant of old church towers and deadwood trees in the forests, is increasingly under threat in this region. The declining insect diversity, ever-increasing sprawl of urban areas, the structure of "modern buildings" which leaves no space or gaps for the animals are the sad factors which are exiling these interesting animals to mine tunnels and crevices in quarry walls. Between October and April, the first level of Marie Pit is an important winter residence for the bats.

Thanks to some frightening tales, bats may not be the most popular animals, but seeing them up close, peacefully sleeping and learning about the story of their protection, definitely makes them much more lovable.

Accompanied by the bat expert, Dr Andreas Arnold, the volunteer-run Historical Mining Association Odenwald decided to do something to protect these interesting animals. To analyze and understand their behaviour better they installed several data meters in the mine pit to measure temperature and they are also counting the bat population. Based on the results Dr Arnold can propose protection measures for the Regional Administrative Council of Karlsruhe. Funded by the town of Weinheim and the Geo-Naturepark, the mining association hopes to stabilise the numbers of the greater mouse-eared bat population.

“ seeing them up close, peacefully sleeping and learning about the story of their protection, definitely makes them much more lovable



“ *she even has a nickname: Ida, after the daughter of the Norwegian paleontologist Jørn Hurum, who found her*

Darwinius masillae, one of our earliest ancestors (Photo by Per Aas).

Mysteries and rocks

Ask any kid about dinosaurs and they will immediately name at least three of them. We know a lot about dinosaurs - but what happened on Earth after they went extinct? If you are interested in the history of life, especially curious about the dawn of the mammals (in other words: the super early human history), one of the best places to visit is Messel Pit, a former oil shale mine not far from Darmstadt. In this open pit more than 50,000 fossils have been found with 1,000 different animal and more than 100 plant species. You can see fantastic, 48 million year old fossils of cat sized predators, fast running herbivores, early primates, hedgehogs, pygmy horses (a few of them were pregnant), large crocodiles, and even nine mating pairs of turtles. You can see one of our earliest ancestors too, who is a young dry nose ape, *Darwinius masillae*. She even has a nickname: Ida, after the daughter of the Norwegian paleontologist Jørn Hurum, who found her. But what makes these findings really unique and mysterious is the excellent preservation of full-body skeletons, with skin and fur shadows, feathers and even with stomach contents. There is a one meter long snake, for example, with a lizard in its stomach who has a beetle in its belly.

3

Mysteriously, all of these animals died quickly and it raised an interesting question for scientists: what caused their unexpected death? One theory names the Mazuku (which means “evil wind” in the Swahili language) as a possible culprit. Millions of years ago the Messel Pit was a volcanic lake. According to this theory, time after time, like an eruption, huge amounts of carbon dioxide can be released from the depths of the water. This evil wind could then have caused the sudden fate of these animals in, around, and above the lake.

Although it has been known since the 1860s that fossils can be found here, more than a century later in the 1970s this treasure was at risk: a landfill for the entire Rhine-Main region was to be built over the disused open-cast mine. Through the dedicated efforts of passionate locals, geoscientists and the support of the Messel municipality (the other rock-stars of this story), the plan was retracted. Due to the scientific proof on the Eocene fossil site, with its unique precursors of today's mammals, in 1995 Messel Pit was declared as the first UNESCO World Natural Heritage Site in Germany.



"The guardian of the vines" sculpture by Richard Lulay

Grapes and stones

Reinhard Antes is passionate about minerals. But not just beautiful stones, he loves grapes too. He is the current chairman of the local wine cooperative and for years he was cherishing a dream: to share his passion with other people. He wanted to build a special trail through hills and vineyards, a geological wine trail that would demonstrate the close relationships and interconnections between wine, grapevines, soil and rocks in his home region. Hearing about the idea, Geo-Naturepark became immediately excited and the result is now an almost 7 km hiking trail with more than 70 stations on the hills of Heppenheim.

On the path you wander through five German wine regions while enjoying the beautiful landscape. From the info boards you can learn about grape varieties, geology, climate, history, and the flora and fauna of the region. To make the trail even more interesting, on the way you will also come across great sculptures and artworks made by local artists. You can

see and be inspired by "The guardian of the vines" (sculpted by Richard Lulay) the large sandstone hands which are protecting a grape to remind us of the next generations, and the genetic resources we have to preserve for them. Or you can stop at another one called "Wine is born between sandstone and granite". The sculptor Eva-Gesine Wegner worked on this sculpture for two months followed by the curious eyes of the passers-by. She worked without a preliminary draft, but rather intuitively followed the stone, the topic and the circumstances and conversations on site - the result was open to everyone until the last moment.

It's also good to know that while you are visiting the trail and enjoying nature, the sculptures or the wines, Reinhard Antes and his colleagues are working on the reintroduction of old climate-resistant grapes, trying to maintain the genetic diversity of the local varieties, especially the historic "Red Riesling".

“ the large sandstone hands which are protecting a grape to remind us of the next generations



U-Boot (Submarine) by Roger Rigorth

Enchanted forest

What would you think if, walking in a forest, you would stumble upon a wooden submarine emerging from the forest floor? And not far from it, you would see giant birdhouses with dozens of bird names on their side? Or a canopy made of copper sheets, decorated with an abundance of symbols, like animals, star constellations, mythical scenes and writings?

Since 2002, every second year, the International Forest Art Trail has been organised in Darmstadt. Artists from all over the world arrive here to build their forest inspired installations, some exciting, some thought provoking. But the Art Trail is not just about these installations. There are fun activities for families and children too. They can create art in the forest: from clay they can make funny forest creatures or lay vibrant mandalas. The aim of the trail is to bring the visitor closer to nature - through inspiring art. Each year has a concept, like *“Freedom and Wilderness”* or *“Art Transformation”*. In 2020 the theme was *“Art / Nature / Identity”*. The giant birdhouses installation, for example, with the dozens of bird names was called Cloud Cuckoo Land, and, as the artist put it, conveyed the message that there is a place for everyone:

whether you are an international, a local or an immigrant bird.

This year *“identity”* was an especially important topic for one of the participants of the Art Trail. Her name is Samira Jamali, an art teacher and photographer from Iran. She fled from her country to Germany just a few years ago, leaving everything behind to start a new life. Thanks to the International Forest Art Association she became an intern here. She not only helped with organising the event, but also worked on installations (operating a drill or sawing), learning to understand, feel and work with new materials, while exchanging ideas with the artists. The International Forest Art Trail not only gave her the opportunity to rediscover and live her artistic potential but also the feeling that, after many months of uncertainty and of being on the road, she has finally arrived at a place where she can thrive as an artist and where she can feel at home.

“ *what would you think if, walking in a forest, you would stumble upon a wooden submarine emerging from the forest floor?* ”



Sunset over Odenwald.

photo by
Bernd Doerwald



The Chapel of the Holy Cross in the Kleiner Odenwald.

photo by Tobias
Städtler



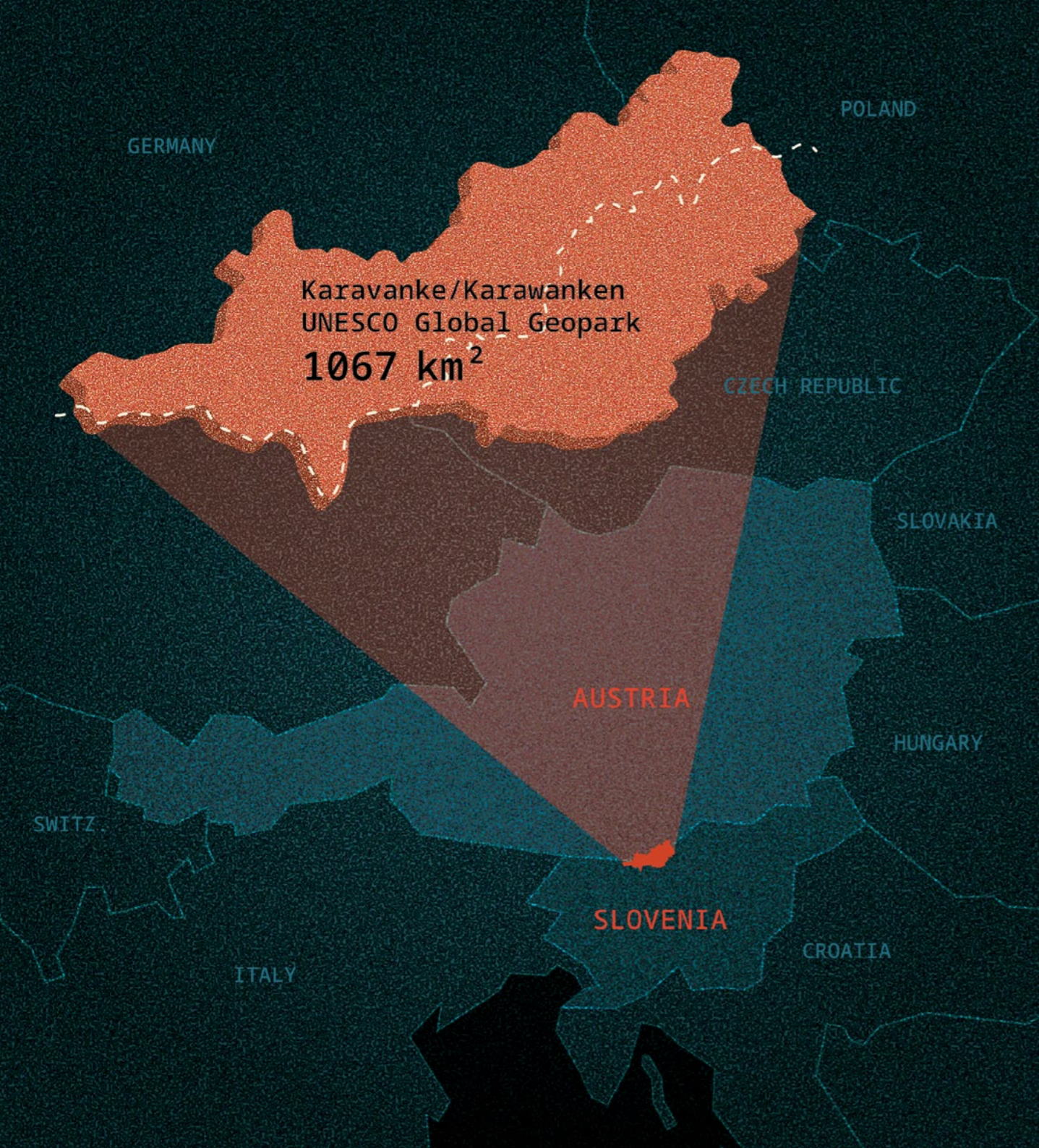
Forest Birdhouses
by Freddie Beckmans.

photo by
Ute Ritschel



Autumn in
Bensheim-Auerbach.

photo by
Pascal Weber



Karavanke/ Karawanken UNESCO Global Geopark

Geopark Karavanke is a crossborder geopark connected and divided by the majestic mountain range, The Karawanks. The area is formed by nine municipalities from Austria and five from Slovenia. Its beautiful forests, mountain meadows, and cliffs are habitats of some rare, endangered plant and animal species. Travelling through the region you can stumble upon castles, chapels, crosses, and wayside shrines (possibly some fairies from the local folktales as well), but the area is also marked by a centuries-old mining tradition.

The Geopark was established in 2011 through a bottom-up process involving all relevant local and regional actors from landowners and community groups to tourism providers. The Geopark hopes to empower local communities and give them the opportunity to develop cohesive partnerships. Since this place is among the most sparsely populated areas in the region, the Geopark also hopes to give local people a sense of pride in their region and strengthen their identification with the area by raising awareness about the geological heritage connected to its history and society.

ALPS
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Buckwheat: known as Heiden, Heda, Hadn or Ajda.

A superfood with many names

1

If you were invited to a Carinthian farmer's kitchen sometime around the 16th or 17th centuries you would be surprised to see what was on the kitchen table. In the early morning, with coffee, buckwheat was served. In the late morning you could eat soup (milk or buttermilk) - also with buckwheat. Based on the season, you could eat buckwheat refined with fruits like cherries or blackberries. It was a very popular and practical meal, as steaming in the water, it only took a few minutes to cook. Buckwheat was harvested usually twice a year because it grows so quickly.

Depending on the region, buckwheat is called Heiden, Heda, Hadn or Ajda (as you can encounter it now in Slovenia). Another common name is black polenta. While it originated from Central Asia, in the Middle Ages the cold-sensitive Hadn spread in the warmer southern Alpine region too. Finally finding its way to Carinthia, it was initially grown in large quantities in the Jauntal valley. Unfortunately buckwheat was largely displaced in the 19th and 20th centuries by maize, potato and wheat. Only in the past few years can you see

buckwheat growing more frequently in the region again. Hadn is actually not a type of grain, but belongs to the knotweed family and is a close relative of sorrel and rhubarb. This plant thrives on poor soil and does not like artificial fertilizers and manure at all. Buckwheat is particularly rich in potassium, iron, calcium, magnesium, silica and vitamins - and it's gluten free. For the eye it offers vivid pink and white sea of flowers beautifully decorating the landscape of Lower Carinthia.

Since 1997, the "*Genussregion Jauntaler Hadn*", an association of farmers, innkeepers and the dedicated community of Neuhaus, promotes buckwheat in several ways. They wrote a book (with a lot of recipes), organised festivals, and even opened a visitor center with an impressive wooden hand mill in the heart of it. So you can buy Hadn cake, nudel, chips, and the traditional porridge, sterz - or you can make your own meal from the flour grinded here.

“ it offers vivid pink and white sea of flowers beautifully decorating the landscape of Lower Carinthia



A snow castle for King Matjaž

The sleeping king

The king had been sleeping under the mountain for centuries. When he was attacked by the enemy, to save him the Peca mountain swallowed him up. When his beard will grow and wrap around his table 9 times he will wake up and will bring happiness and prosperity to the land. At least, this is what the local legend says about King Matjaž. But where will he live after he wakes up?

Since 1993, every year, during the last weekend of January, people gather at Črna na Koroškem, with shovels, trowels, saws, and other tools. Not to dig out the king, but to build snow castles and ice sculptures inspired by, or maybe for him. King Matjaž is a popular character in the local folklore: from tales to poems, from paintings to art events, he is celebrated all around the region. He was a noble king, modeled after the historical King Mathias, but the origin of the legend probably dates back to pre-Christian mythology.

The story is enigmatic enough to spark the imagination of artists - whether they are wholehearted local families or professional

ice sculptors from abroad. Building the snow and ice sculptures is a competition between teams, but more importantly a heartwarming event during the cold January days with a lot of music, programs, good food and enthusiastic people. To make it even more magical once the sun sets people begin to light up their snow creations with candles and torches. Since this event's beginning, more than 1300 snow castles and sculptures have been built here making the gathering one of the most recognizable (and visited) events in Slovenia.

“ *building the snow and ice sculptures is a competition between teams, but more importantly a heartwarming event during the cold January days* ”



The mystic Rosaliengrotte in Hemmaberg.

Everyday miracles

In 2014 after a series of heavy rains, the boulders of Rosalia cave came loose and a massive rock fall made it too dangerous to visit. The cave with its small chapel is the lower part of a huge religious complex called Hemmaberg, a thousand year old pilgrimage destination with incredible attractivity. It was first a cult place on the holy mountain. We know for sure about the Celts who came to this area worshipping their (supposedly) female deity, Iouenat, whose name is still visible on a carved stone. Then, from the early Christian time, churches, chapels and residential buildings were erected on the plateau. One of the most interesting buildings is a pilgrim house which had its own elaborate floor and wall heating system - to make sure that not just the spiritual but also the physical needs of the pilgrims were well taken care of.

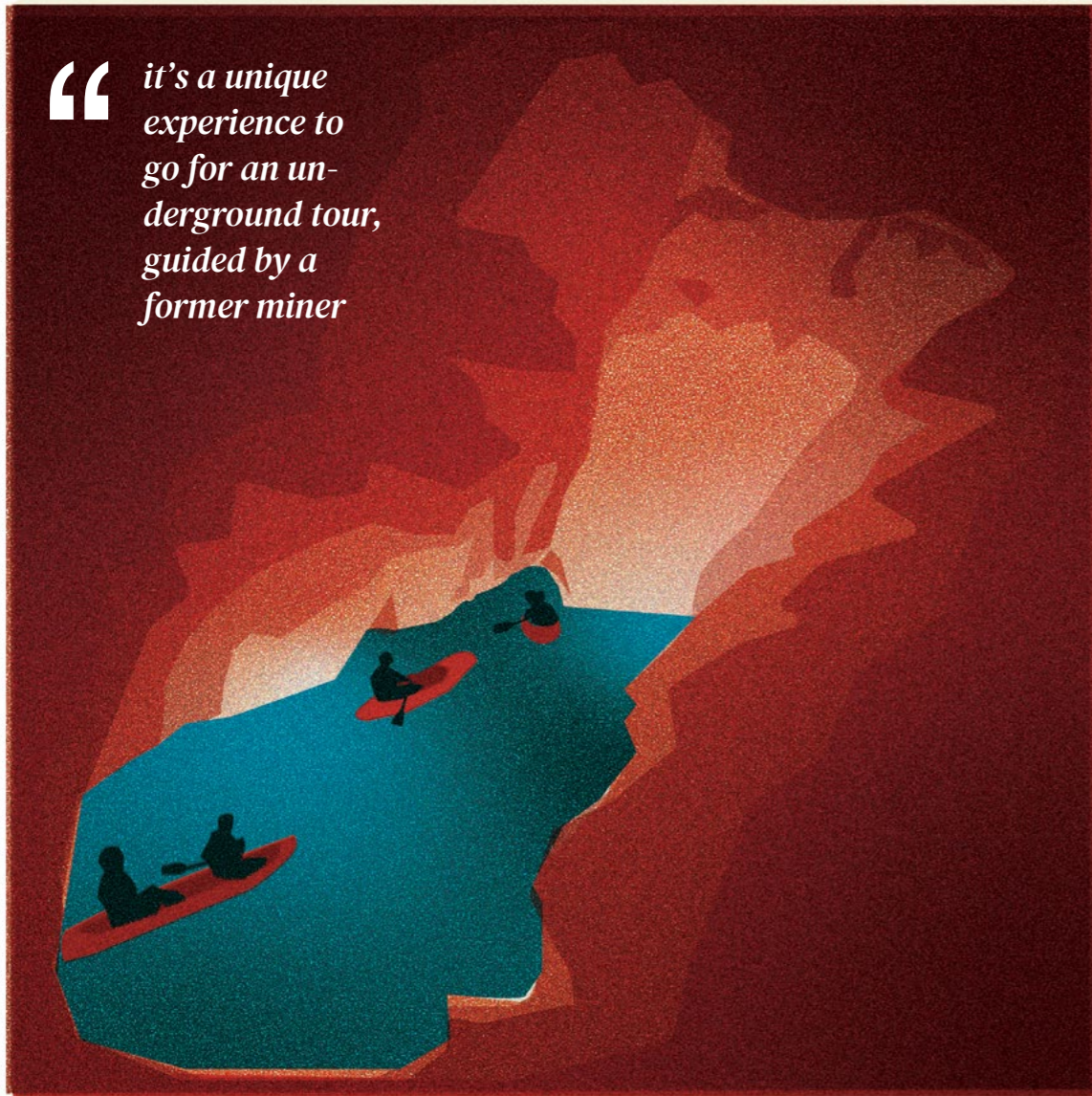
Although today, apart from a church built in the 1500s, the site mostly consists of ruins, it is still a very popular location. What makes Hemmaberg attractive for modern day visitors? It has an overall tranquil atmosphere, for sure, but definitely it's the mystic Rosaliengrotte, the cave with the sculpture of Rosalia, and its miraculous

healing spring which magnetizes the people who are thirsty for not just fresh water but also miracles.

After the closure of the cave in 2014, the surrounding communities did everything they could in order to reopen the cave. Associations, companies and private individuals contributed with generous donations, and with the support of Geopark an almost six year long renovation began. As part of the extensive work, to protect the 40 meter high rock above the path to the grotto, around 100 anchors were glued into the stone up to eight meters deep. The staircase was also renewed with railings, along with new steps to enter the cave. The spring was also given a new, carefully carved, two armed wooden channel. Now it's finally open again and you can now test for yourself the power of the magical spring.

“ *the surrounding communities did everything they could in order to reopen the cave* ”

“ it’s a unique experience to go for an underground tour, guided by a former miner



Kayaking in the flooded tunnels of Mežica mine

Tunnels filled with adventures

4

For kids with a vivid imagination, the mine in Mežica was the place where dwarfs are dancing in the dark - for others, it was the home of the “*bergmandelc*”, a frightful underground creature who collects the lost souls of miners. But for the locals, who worked there it was their everyday reality: the mine provided the daily bread for numerous families and over the entire area had a significant impact on life. The Mežica mine was one of the last lead-zinc mines in Europe still operating at the end of the 20th century. When it eventually closed, a rich technical, cultural and natural heritage still remained here.

During the centuries of its operation, an impressive, 1000 km tunnel system was carved into the mountain due to the search for valuable metals. The mine had as many as 300 entrances. All in all, an estimated 19 million tonnes of ore were dug up by the miners, acquiring one million tonnes of lead and half a million tonnes of zinc. As the story goes, lead mined here was used to make the bullets for Napoleon’s soldiers. Entering the mine, you can descend 700 metres below the earth’s surface to explore giant excavation areas, mysterious tunnels, and immense underground chambers.

The workers of the mine didn’t want this treasure to disappear so they decided to step up and establish a company. Thanks to their efforts, the tourist mine and museum opened its gate to visitors in 1997. It’s a unique experience to go for an underground tour, guided by a former miner who will take you in the footsteps of his former workplace. To be precise, this adventure is not only by foot, as you can also take a 15-minute incredible journey in the original miners’ train too. Mining equipment and a number of well-preserved machines are displayed on the very same spots where they were once used by the miners at work. You can see the tunnels which were also dug through the ore deposits, so you’ll have the experience of seeing some remains of the glittering, grey coloured metallic lead ore.

For the ones seeking an exclusive experience, the mine offers a 6 kilometer long underground bike trail, while for the even more adventurous, there are flooded tunnels for kayaking. Each year about 20,000 people visit the mine which makes it the most popular tourist destination in the region - a fact that is also recognised by numerous awards.

“ he just had enough faith that he had given enough love to them, to appreciate and protect this beautiful heritage



Paintings on the meadows

When Rudolf Galob died in 1986 he left a mysterious inheritance for his family. In his old warehouse the family found 130 small packages - each of them were individually wrapped, protected from dust with a thick layer of newspaper and marked with elegant handwriting. Unfolding them an unbelievable sight came to light: old, beautifully painted, wooden beehive panels.

Beekeepers in this region traditionally used small wooden bee houses, called “*kranjiči*”. Who knows, maybe to differentiate them, or simply just to beautify their environment, they started to paint the front planks of their *kranjiči*. The meadows colored by these beehives were also a kind of spiritual place for them, to rest, pray and gather strength surrounded by their beloved bees. So maybe the panels had other functions too. These friendly, warm color panels offer a selection of biblical motifs about saints and legends, and various secular decorations such as historical events, images of animals and objects, human traits or mockery of professions. The oldest panels date back to 1820, while the majority of them are from the second half of the 19th century.

During the last century, Carinthian beekeepers slowly changed their beekeeping methods, replacing the small wooden bee houses with more modern ones. Rudolf Galob, an exceptional teacher and also a pioneer beekeeper in the Carinthian village of Mežica, was very well aware that an old era was dying out and with this also the culture of beehive paintings. So he started to collect, group and study them. But not just panels, he also collected beekeeping literature, wrote stories, and compiled biographies of old beekeepers from Mežica.

However he never told his family what to do with these panels - when he died he didn't even leave them to anyone in particular. He just had enough faith that he had given enough love to them, to appreciate and protect this beautiful heritage. He was right: the preserved collection left a real echo on his descendants. Since 2012, the beehive panels have been displayed in Mežica to charm the curious visitors and travel them back to a time when meadows were more colourful (and magical) than nowadays.

Old, painted beehive panels with various motifs (Photo by Tomo Jeseničnik)



Buckwheat under the Peca mountain.

photo by Urosh Grabner



Traditional sunrise hike on the Peca mountain.

photo by Urosh Grabner



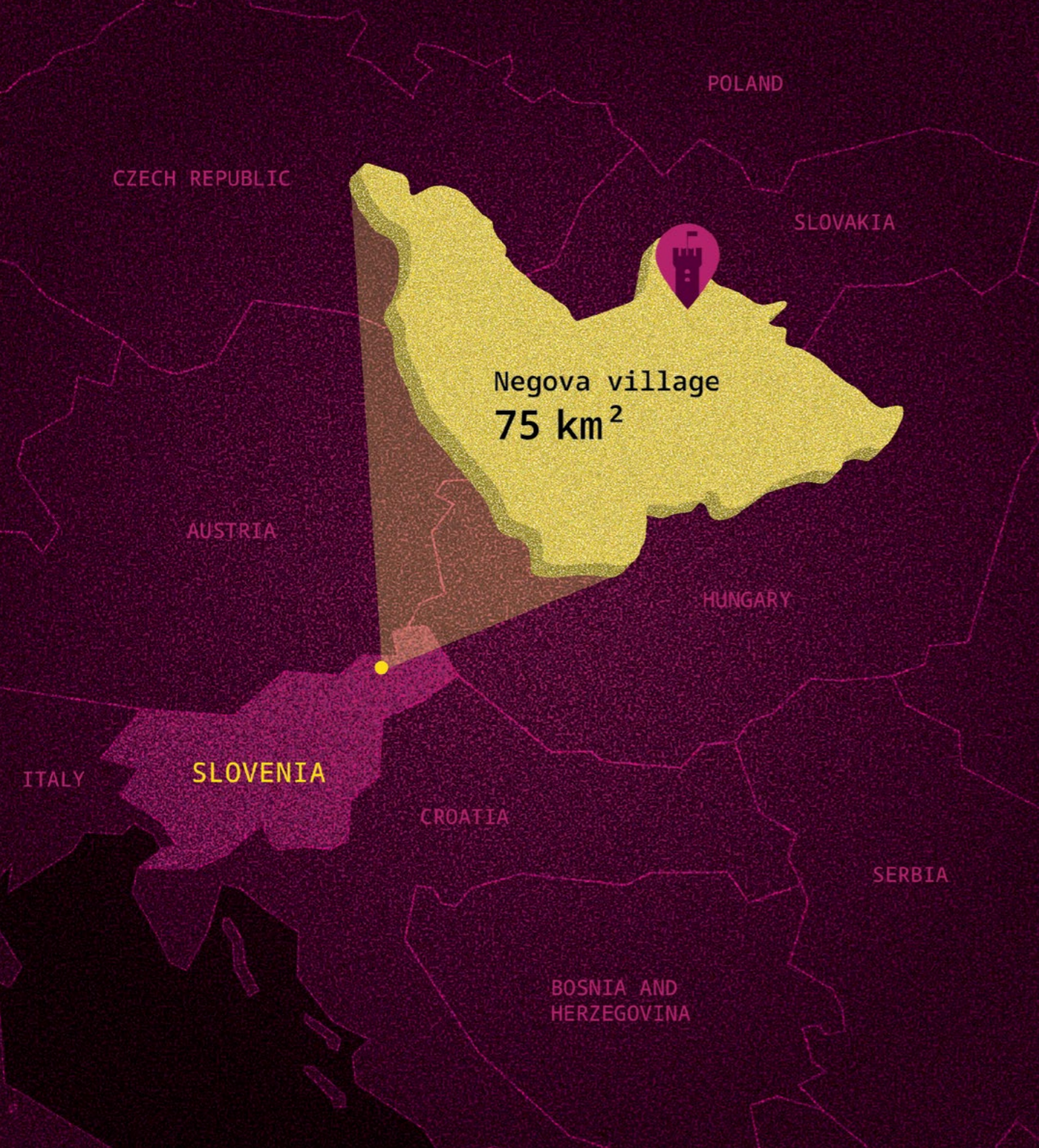
Above the Karawanks mountain range.

photo by Urosh Grabner



Hemmaberg, a 1.500 year old pilgrimage site.

photo by Urosh Grabner



Negova Castle

Let us now visit a small village in a hidden corner of Slovenia: Negova. In this village, we can find a real treasure - a beautiful medieval castle which recently went through a major renovation after decades of decay. The castle is a harmonious mixture of different architectural styles, from Romanesque and Gothic to Renaissance and Baroque. There are many events within the castle walls and in its courtyard, from festivals and concerts to exhibitions and workshops, with a special attention on children's programs. However, the oldest part of the castle is still awaiting renovation.

The Negova Castle is run by Kultprotur, a public institution, but the community organization based in the city of Maribor also organises programs here: a major one is the Festival of Love. Since 2015, the Negova Castle is also one of the prestigious FIAP's international photographic exhibition centres. The programs bring the local community together, especially as they are also involved in developing most of the events. The castle provides the opportunity to rediscover and promote local history, traditions and the landscape, while stimulating local creativity and strengthening the community's sense of belonging and pride.

AVIATION



Mowing the lawn on the castle slope in Negova.

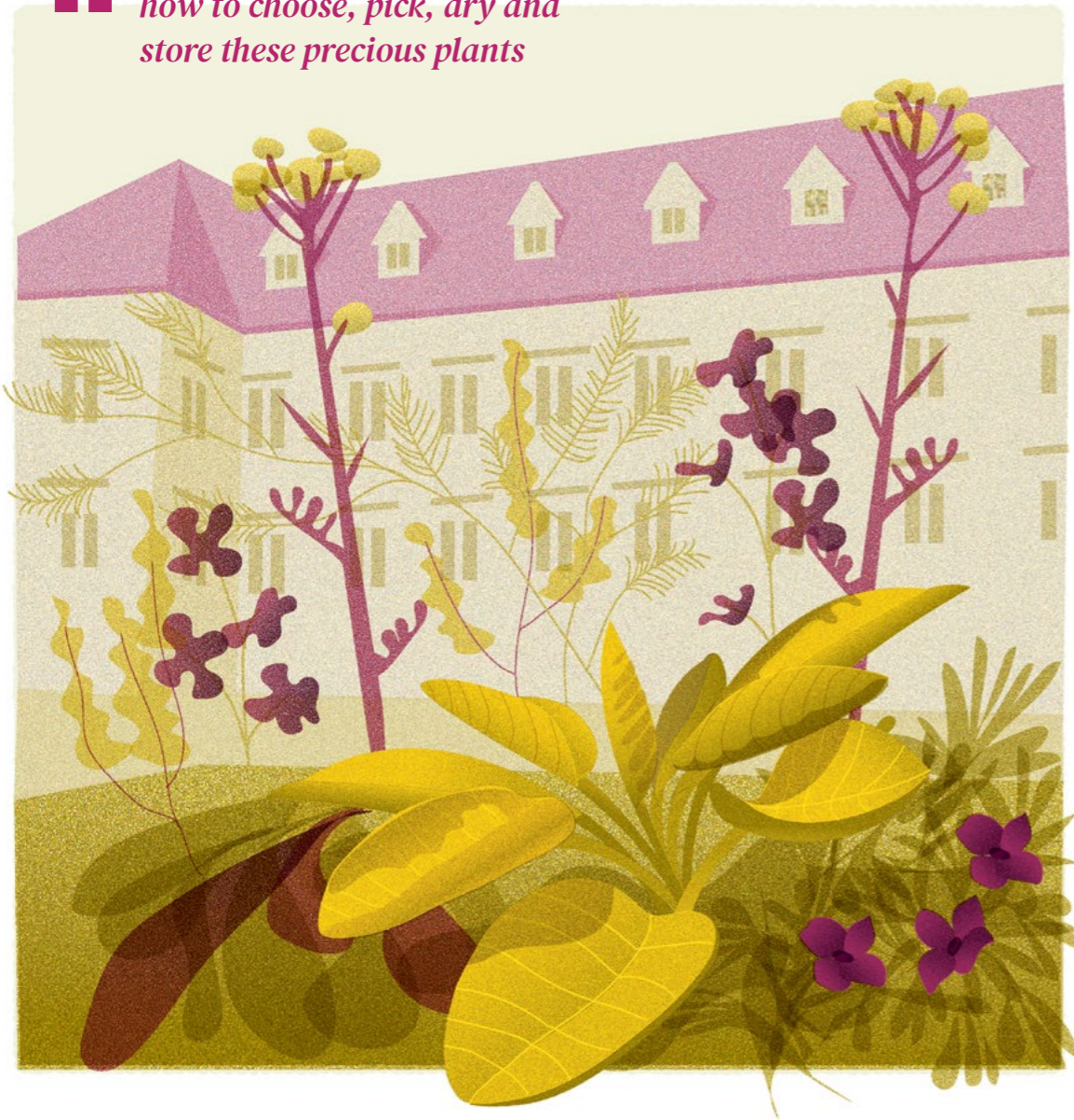
Dear old days

Although it's very early in the morning (just 5 am), a group of men gather together in the dark at the slope of Negova castle - just like they did one year ago. There are kids and grownups mixed, mostly local people, but you can see some guests too, and even the mayor of the nearby town is here. They all wear blue aprons and have scythes in their hands. They came together to do a very important job: to mow the lawn on the castle slope. The slope is steep, it would be difficult to work with a modern lawnmower. But this is not the main reason for gathering together, like their ancestors did in the olden days. The real purpose is to preserve an old custom which was built on a simple principle: helping each other. So they start to work: they cut the grass, they move, cut the grass, move, in an excellently synchronised way. They sing - modern tunes, and old folk songs (the one which says: *"When the dawn breaks, let's go to mow..."*), and every few meters they stop to sharpen their blades. Meanwhile, women are preparing delicious meals which will serve as a reward after the long morning. But women can mow the grass too, although (as the old habit dictates) they are allowed to use only sickles. Behind the reapers the cut grass is put in a high, neat pile to dry. The perfect way to store hay for the livestock.

Mowing the grass is not the only old habit the local people hope to preserve. Coming together to hand peel the ripened corn is another one. Besides the fun they are having (during the work a lot of humorous stories are shared) their labor is thanked with roasted chestnuts (collected from the castle forest) served with a sweet grape juice, and accompanied by the refreshing sound of the accordion. Just below the walls blue grape grows - another perfect opportunity to congregate for an autumn harvest. The grape is collected in special wooden baskets carried by young boys, and pressed in a 101 year-old large press. However, some habits are not practiced anymore: nobody is shooting with a gun before the picking starts to drive the snakes out; and tasting the grape before the harvest time is not forbidden anymore. Harvesters can squeeze out almost 200 liters of juice (called *must*) from the dark blue fruit which will be wine soon, baptized by the local pastor and consumed by the visitors of the castle. If you plan to indulge your senses, unfortunately you can't buy this wine in a shop, but in the castle you can have a sip of it.

“ they cut the grass, they move, cut the grass, move, in an excellently synchronised way

“ you can learn from the experts how to choose, pick, dry and store these precious plants



Negova Adventure and Educational Herb Park

In the footsteps of Apollonia

Red haired Apollonia Heric used to collect herbs to cure sick animals or offer remedies to her fellow villagers. Allegedly, her cows were healthier and she could make much more butter from their milk. Back in those days in the 18th century, people in the countryside didn't know the term herbalist. But they did know another word: witch. There were floods, there were poor harvests, plagues, or raids by enemy troops. Somebody had to take the blame. So Apollonia was captured and imprisoned with the charge of witchcraft. Luckily her case, which was the last witch trial in Styria, ended well: instead of finishing her life on the stake, or being thrown into the water to be judged by God, after 450 days she was eventually released from prison.

Apollonia would be very surprised to see the important role that herbs play nowadays in Negova. Firstly, collecting and using herbs is not considered a sin - on the contrary. Anyone can freely visit the annual Herb Day in the castle (without being thrown into prison) and enjoy interesting presentations and practical workshops. If you want to use herbs, just like Apollonia once did, you can learn from the experts how

to choose, pick, dry and store these precious plants. Which one will make your dinner tastier, which one is for stress, or helps to sleep better? If you are a pro, it's a perfect opportunity to dig yourself into advanced topics like making tinctures, ointments, or even soaps from herbs. During the day dozens of organisations from all over Slovenia present themselves in the herb market, offering exchanges of herb seedlings, and an abundance of herbal products. Some edible, some to put on the skin or inhale. If you miss the date of the Herb Day, inside the castle there is a herbal exhibition to visit, with a corner dedicated to Apollonia.

But the real surprise waits for you outside the walls: the castle even has its own herb garden. However, it's a little bit bigger than the usual herb plot we would have in our backyards. The Negova Adventure and Educational Herb Park has 300 flower beds with more than 550 plants, organised in thematic sections, each plant marked with clay tiles, where the name of the herb is written in Slovene and Latin. The garden is taken care of by the people of Negova themselves who are happy to show their beautiful garden to the visitors.



The pranger, the “pillar of shame” in Negova.

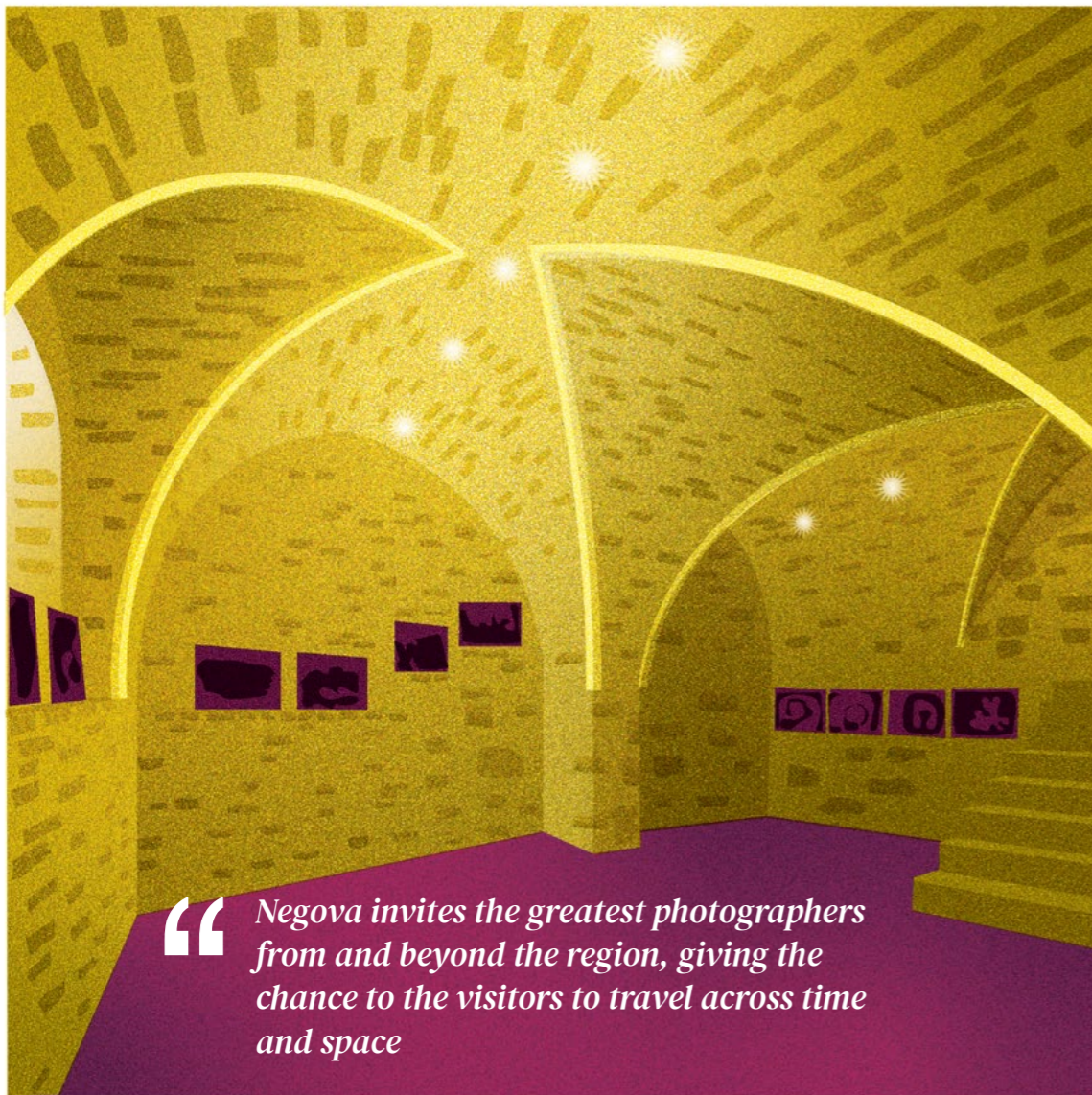
Crime and punishment

Walking towards the Negova castle, you’ll pass by a large rock, standing lonely on the side of the road. It’s gray, doesn’t look interesting at all - you probably won’t even notice it. But if you know what it is, you will certainly stop. The writing on its side gives you a little clue. It says: *“Honestus rumor alterum patrimonium”* (A good name is a second inheritance). The stone is called a pranger, a “pillar of shame” - a punishment device dating back to 1686. How did it work? Convicts were tied to the stone, and depending on the weight of their offence, they had to spend hours or even a day there without food and water. The pranger was usually placed where most people gathered: next to the church. So the people could see and also judge the lawbreakers, sometimes by insulting, mocking, beating or more often by throwing filth, like rotten vegetables on them. It was enough to steal fish from the castle pond to end up on the pranger, but adulterers, troublemakers and other minor violations were punished too. The pranger seems a much less serious punishment than a longer prison (or a death) sentence, but sometimes the humiliation was so significant that the convict had to leave their home and move to another place because of the shame. So much for the good name you left for your descendants.

Prangers were in use till the end of the 18th century - but in a way they still have a unique

“ the prangerijada not just connects these small communities, but it’s something to be excited about, to wait and prepare for

function. Through all of Slovenia, there are only 12 places where prangers can be found. And these places thought that their intriguing heritage is worth celebrating. Every year they have a festival called *“prangerijada”*, held at a selected pranger site. Negova has already hosted the event twice. The prangerijada not just connects these small communities, but it’s something to be excited about, to wait and prepare for. Apart from the rich cultural and entertainment programs, what makes this festival really unique is the replaying of some of the pranger trials, with the actors wearing medieval costumes. Based on original written sources from the Maribor Archives the Negova group stages a show called *“Fishing like that”*. Among the enthusiastic participants who turn the old text into an entertaining (and very funny) play, you can find the mayor’s wife or the former principal of the Negova primary school. The central characters in the trial are the hungry peasants who steal fish from the castle pond, although they claim that they had the right to fish. At the end of the play the noblemen turn out to be greedy and stupid and the peasants, of course, clever. This play is performed in other fairs and events too. Once the guests of the Slovenian lawyers meeting even had the privilege to see it - and think about its morals.



“*Negova invites the greatest photographers from and beyond the region, giving the chance to the visitors to travel across time and space*”

In the halls of Fotograd Negova

Helmets and photographs

In 1811, just a few kilometers from the Negova Castle, the farmer Jurij Slaček was clearing his land when suddenly he found something unexpected. 26 bronze helmets were carefully stacked not too deep underground. They had different shapes and were made in different times, two thousand years ago. Who buried them and why, is still a mystery. One theory is that they were used in a ritual, the other is that they must have been battle spoils collected over a long period of time. Today, the helmets can be seen in different museums - unfortunately none of them are in Negova.

The helmets are just one of the interesting stories surrounding the castle. There is another spooky one about a Turkish soldier who, during an invasion, climbed over the wall of the castle - and later was buried alive in the wall of the castle. Or about the two prisoners, sentenced to death, whose last task was to dig a well for the castle - they dug, with inapt tools, working day and night, an 80 meter deep well. Thus, their lives were spared and they gained their freedom. These are intriguing stories but if you are managing a newly renovated (and empty) castle and looking for contents to fill it, you face a major challenge. These stories are not quite enough by themselves to attract visitors. So the castle operators had to

come up with a completely different approach. They were looking for a solution which doesn't cost too much money, fits the elegance of the castle but at the same time can bridge the rich past of the place with the modern times we live in.

The idea was simple, but turned out to be brilliant: to become a photo exhibition center. Taking the task seriously, the very first exhibit was organised so well, that the FIAP (The International Federation of Photographic Art) awarded them the prestigious status of FIAP Exhibition Center. Negova Castle (under the new name Fotograd Negova) became the fifth such center in the world. The main mission of these venues is to promote photographers and their works more widely but also to open a window for us to see how the art of photography is evolving around the globe. Accompanying the several yearly exhibitions, lectures and talks are also organised about the exhibited images. Fotograd Negova invites the greatest photographers from and beyond the region, giving the chance to the visitors to travel across time and space and (through the often strong social commentary of the pictures) encounter different world views.



Having fun in the Grajski Tabor (Photo by Tourism association Negova-Spodnji Ivanjci).

Dresses and shields

Growing up close to a real castle, people tend to long for those times, the days of lords and knights and countesses. How did they live in the castle, talk to each other - or how did they feel wearing their distinctive costumes? Just when the major renovation finished in 2011 the people in Negova started to realise how beautiful their castle is. Not long after, they started to think: what if? What if they recreate some of those fancy (or distinctive) costumes and, even just on certain occasions, live the life of their medieval ancestors. This is how the idea of the Negova Lordship was born. Now the group unites about 60 people of all generations, who happily transform into noblemen or peasants. First they borrowed costumes from the Maribor national Theater, but then they came up with their first formal dresses for the castle gentlemen - all hand-sewn. The count, the countess, guards, clerks, winemakers, judges or simple workers, they all wear unique costumes. From guiding people around the castle to performing at weddings, they conduct a lot of activities - and they enjoy it a lot. As they like to say, when wearing old costumes you feel something that cannot be described.

Although there are children in the Negova Lordship, the group mostly consists of adults. But this doesn't mean that the younger generation is left out of the fun. Almost every year a medieval camp, the Grajski Tabor, is organised with one sole purpose: to help kids travel back in time through an immersive experience. After arriving at the camp

they change into medieval clothes. They also choose a motif which will be displayed on coats of arms and flags. Since the very first thing that pops into almost every kid's mind about castles is a siege, they can get to know the swords, axes and bows of the old time knights. They can practice fencing and archery, even make their own swords - out of wood, for sure. Collecting hazel sticks from the nearby forest they can make bows too. But the camp is not just about weapons and fighting: there are different art workshops here to participate in. Children can learn, for example, how to make leather pouches or what are the tricks of writing marvelous calligraphy with goose feathers and inks. Using an old printing machine they can also learn how books were once made. There are "medieval lectures" too, about dance, history, games, food, heraldry, nature and so on. After fishing in the castle ponds (of course, they make their own fishing rods) kids can make a magic potion from herbs to be stronger (and healthier) knights. The meals in the camp are made in a cauldron, served on wooden plates - and eaten with wooden spoons. But the best thing about this camp is that it is run by volunteers: teachers from the nearby schools, helpers from the tourist organisation and older students. So hopefully one day the kids who learnt knightly things here can teach the same values to the next generation.

“ *when wearing old costumes you feel something that cannot be described* ”



Grad Negova,
the Negova Castle.

photo by
Tamara Vogrin Tara



Picking linden
flowers in Negova.

photo by
Dijana Božić



Foggy morning at
the Negova lake.

photo by
Dusan Kozar



A medieval after-
noon in Negova.

photo by
Dijana Božić

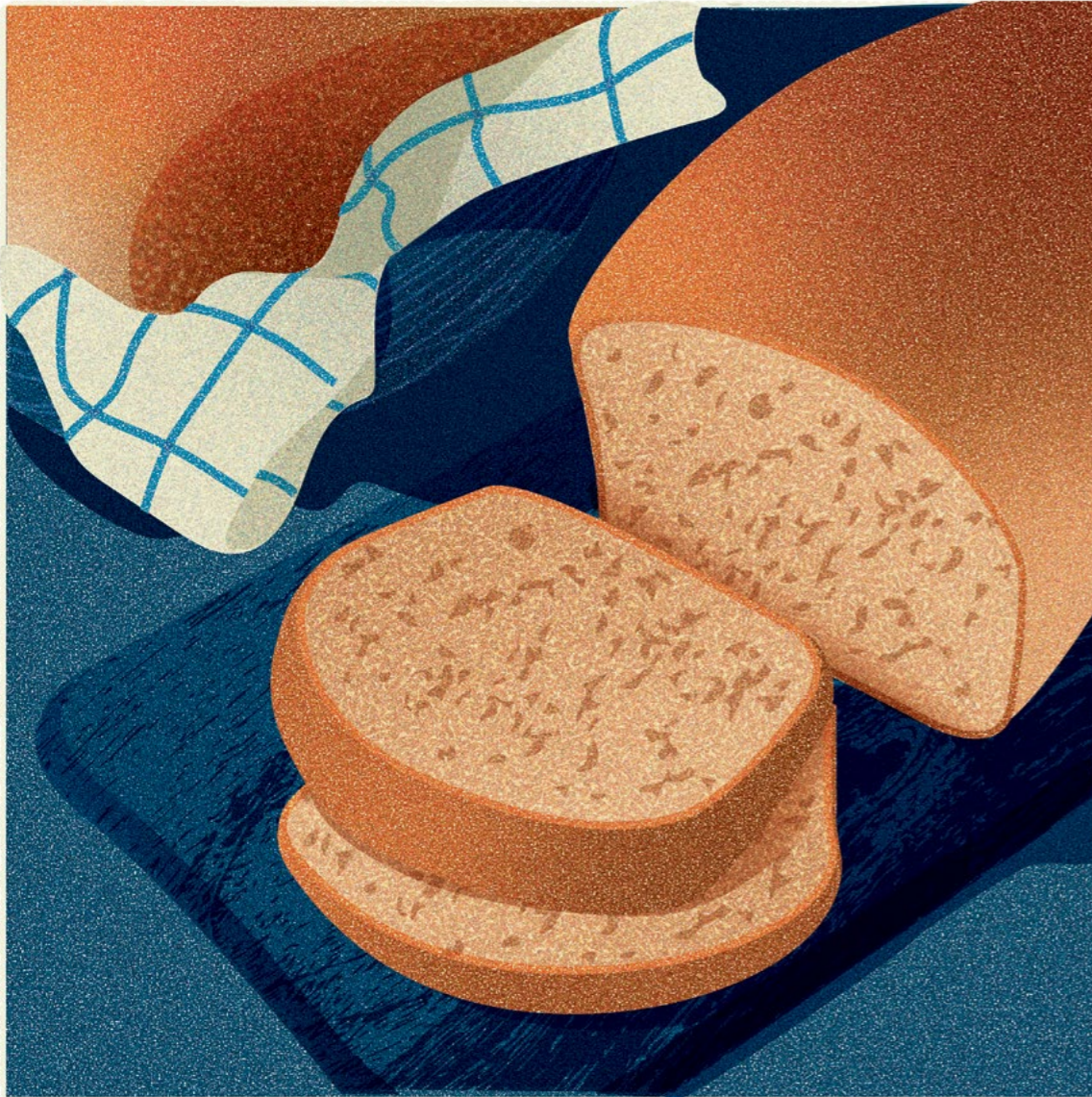


Appignano del Tronto

Appignano del Tronto lies in Central Italy, 20 kilometers from the Adriatic Sea, and with its 1728 inhabitants it's the second smallest stop on our journey. The medieval town is surrounded by grey-blue badlands, a beautiful but vulnerable hilly landscape. The badlands offer impressive shapes and colours, depending on the seasons, generated by different weather conditions such as sun, ice, rain and wind. But at the same time, the badlands with its landslides also pose a continuous threat to the town. Throughout the centuries the town has also suffered several times from earthquakes.

Since this vulnerability affects not just the physical construction of the town but the soul of the inhabitants too, the main priority for the municipality is to strengthen their abilities to recover and rebound after disasters or economic crises. They seize every opportunity to become a safer and more competitive community, hoping that they will be able to transform a problem into an opportunity to regenerate the territory.

ITALY



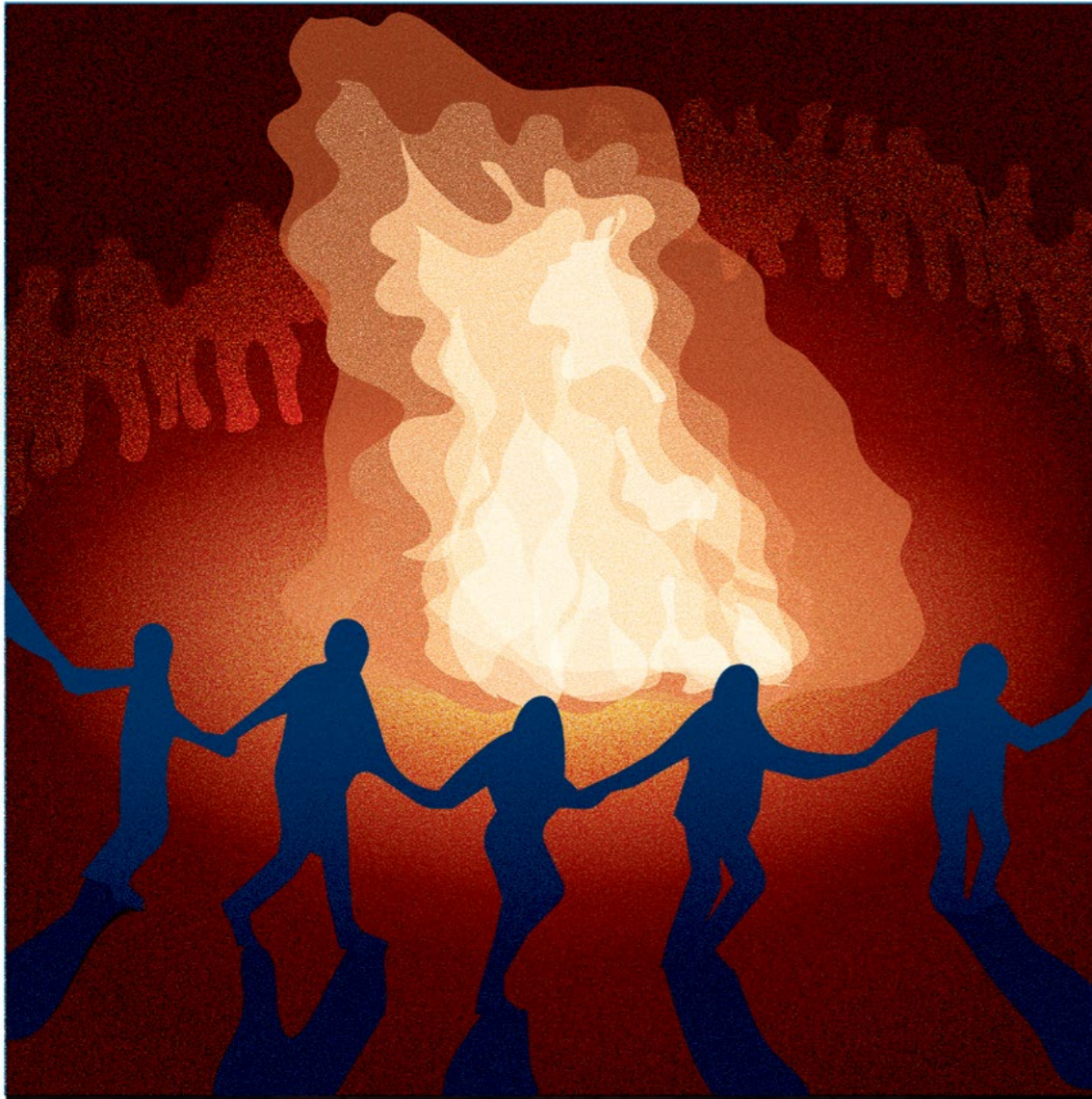
The "Flavor of the past", bread baked by the fire of wild cherry wood.

Bread as a fruit

“ *the delicious bites are baked by the fire of wild cherry wood which comes from controlled forest cutting* ”

Martin was born in Bochum, as its inhabitants call it: *"the rainiest city in Germany"* where the cool winters are long, and the summers are short. He had a wife, Roberta, and he was working as a sales person in a local office. One day, he decided to devote himself to his passion, so they left everything behind and moved to the sunnier South, to the wife's hometown, Appignano del Tronto. They started to farm, but not in the conventional way, because they both felt passionate not just for agriculture but also for the environment. They put sustainability, especially re-naturalization, at the center of their farming method, making their neighbours immediately curious (maybe even suspicious) - why would anybody want to plant a forest on their most productive land? No one believed that instead of exploiting the soil, Martin and Roberta wanted to experiment with finding a delicate balance between nutritious and healthy products and economy. So as a first step, they brought back the native trees and shrubs that had once been cut to restore the original environmental balance.

Now, more than two decades later, their hard work has borne its precious fruit: the farm they own, Valle San Martino, is a very popular producer of home made goods. They bake and twice a week deliver bread and pastries to the surrounding areas. Anyone can visit their farm and admire the organic wood oven they use. It's not a surprise that the delicious bites are baked by the fire of wild cherry wood which comes from controlled forest cutting or pruning from their hedges and local olive groves. From the comments on the local websites, it's clear that the donuts with green anise seeds and the chestnut shortbread biscuits are the absolute favourites. People are also passionate about the different sourdough breads they make (with brown rice, millet or barley), just like the rice focaccia and the rusks with raisins. Their secret probably lies in the carefully selected ingredients they use (you can't find refined sugar in their desserts), or perhaps it's the utmost care taken to make them - or simply the taste of the products, the "flavor of the past".



The big bonfire of La Processione dell'anno vecchio

Let's burn the bad things

Some old people say it started after the second world war. Others claim it's a much older tradition, maybe dating back to the XVII. century. One thing is for sure: just a few decades ago it was still a kind of secret gathering, with only locals allowed to participate. It is not easy to describe the "Procession of the old year" ("La Processione dell'anno vecchio") - it's a strange night time funeral, a very unusual send-off of the passing year. A celebration with sometimes funny, even scary costumes, a big bonfire and mighty fireworks - spiced with intricate choreography. The participants of the procession follow a hearse, with a coffin in it. Then comes the bishop and his company (reciting a comical version of a funeral liturgy), altar boys, nuns, the widow, then the close relatives follow, a marching brass band, even Roman guards. The months are represented too, each played by two people. And of course, there is Bonamorte, the Good Death, performed by a group of people dressed in black and hooded. The procession ends by setting the coffin on fire. This represents the passing of the last year, and this is when anyone can throw things into the bonfire. It can be a piece of paper, or (as it happened last year) a small, coffin shaped piece of wood. And indeed,

“ they throw away the misfortunes, the adversities, the bad luck, all sort of negativities hoping that the next year will be different

they throw away the misfortunes, the adversities, the bad luck, all sort of negativities hoping that the next year will be different. That it will be better.

Although it is held during the last days of the year, the planning for this procession starts already in September. Through a lot of meetings, the roles are decided, the costumes are made. From ages 8 to 80 years, many locals participate in the program - but not only locals. In recent years the organisers are trying to increase the interaction between visitors and the characters of the parade. Formerly a visitor could get only a minor role, like one of the close relatives dressed in mourning. But today any guest can play a much more living part of the event (taking the position of one of the months, for example), experiencing first hand the excitement, and being an integral part of the night.

So if you happen to be around Appignano during the winter holidays don't miss out on asking to be August or March, or whichever character you like. But some friendly advice: don't try to get the Bishop's role, because it's already been taken for a long time.

“ to all those who left,
for those who will
never return, and
those who, one day,
want to return



A monument on the Piazza dell'Emigrante.

Return, remember, restart

3

There is a small square in Appignano, called Piazza dell'Emigrante. On this square stands a modest monument: a pole with the globe on its top, and colorful arrows pointing to different directions. On each arrow you can find the name of a city where "Appignanesi" have emigrated, with its distance from Appignano. As the locals say, the arrows are like open arms to shorten distances. The square with its monument is dedicated to all those who left, for those who will never return, and those who, one day, want to return.

But this is not the only way former Appignano dwellers are celebrated here. Every August, in the main square of the town, people gather together for the so-called Riappignano dinner. There is a guest from Australia, another one arrives from Canada. Others are from France, Switzerland, or from not so far away in Rome. All of them lived in Appignano once but now live in other parts of the globe - but they've returned home to strengthen the bonds, to be together.

Every year during the Riappignano dinner, around 200 participants, young and old, locals and emigrants, come together to enjoy the local traditional food and each other's company. Over the grilled vegetables, pasta and salad they can share old and new memories. The income of the dinner always supports local associations and their activities. The tradition started 15 years ago to become now a truly unique event organised by fifty volunteers, 3 organisations and the municipality itself. Although arranging the event poses some challenges (such as tracing down elderly people, who have no internet connection), there are unforgettable moments that are worth all these efforts.

During the last two decades, Appignano del Tronto has lost about 12% of its population. A lot of young people are leaving in search of work and a different future. Events like this clearly show that it is worth staying in a place like Appignano, or to come back for a fresh restart.



“ to heal and to strengthen their community, the inhabitants of Appignano turned to the theatre

How children envision Le Lumano, the monster.

To play, to heal

4

Theatre has a long tradition in Appignano del Tronto. Companies visit the town from all over Italy, and although Appignano has less than 2.000 inhabitants they are the proud owners of their own community theatre, the S.A.L.E. They even organise theatre courses for adults and children. When the massive earthquake hit the region in 2016 demolishing almost half of the houses in the historical heart of Appignano, it therefore wasn't unusual that, to heal and to strengthen their community, the inhabitants of Appignano turned to the theatre.

Barely one year after the devastating event there was a children's play. The story was about a dragon, who is sleeping alone in a sad, dark cave under the town - but one day he wakes up and stretches his limbs to chase away his loneliness. This subtle metaphor of the earthquake was played by schoolchildren and was an artistic path for all participants to come to terms with their collective trauma. A travelling one-man performance, *"La TerraTremano"* (*"The Earth Shakes"*) also visited Appignano to offer an unforgettable night. The actor, Giorgio Felicetti, met the victims of the earthquake in different Italian communities, collected their

memories and stories and turned them into a strong and moving show, a collective tale of an entire population.

Strengthening resilience or building cohesive communities can happen through other, very different stories too. In 1970, a "real" monster was spotted close to Appignano: it was described as a meter long snake (or lizard?), with a black body, yellow eyes, and the head of a toad. The creature must have been really creepy because it left a significant mark on the people's life. Local newspapers were full of shocking details, parents wouldn't let their kids out at night, and grandparents threatened the naughty kids with it. 50 years later the town reimagined the story, organising a three day long community program about *"Le Lumano"*, the monster. It's hard to decide what was the biggest highlight of the event - the video that the schoolkids made (with paper monsters and a superb mockup town) or the theatrical show they performed. Probably the most important thing was that through artistic expression children could face and overcome their fears.



Photographs from the pilgrims (Photo by Mauro Corinti)

Mario and Madre Maria

“ they made vows in order to heal their loved ones, asked for protection, or expressed their gratitude for the miracles they had received

“During a bitterly cold night, my grandfather heard a noise from his field” - this is how Mario usually started his story about Maria Giacobetti, or as her followers called her: Madre Maria. On that cold night, Mario’s grandfather was curious enough to go outside, only to find a young woman curled up on the ground in the dark. “I don’t know where to go” - she said, sobbing. The nuns had sent her away from the convent where she lived and she couldn’t go home either. Mario’s grandfather was touched by her words and offered her refuge in his barn. That young woman was Maria Giacobetti, Appignano del Tronto’s “saint”.

Maria was born in 1900 and from a young age she had religious visions. When she was twenty-seven years old, stigmas appeared on her body: wounds on her hands, feet and chest, which remained visible until her death. In 1949 she convinced the parish priest of Appignano to build a church on the site where she had experienced Marian visions. Several visitors knocked on her door every day asking to be healed or for spiritual advice. Even after she died pilgrims still come to her small sanctuary

bringing photographs and letters with them. Messages in which they made vows in order to heal their loved ones, asked for protection, or expressed their gratitude for the miracles they had received. The memory of Maria would have faded long ago if there was no Mario. He was a dedicated caretaker of Madre Maria’s church. He was happy to show to any visitor not just the church but also the small, hidden room, where the walls are covered with offerings and photos. To take the guests one step closer to the wonder, he also showed the cabinet with Madre Maria’s cilice and her pillow, still full of rocks. Mario was the custodian of those touching testimonies of popular devotion too. Mario’s own devotion also conceals a deep gratitude towards Madre Maria. “It’s thanks to her” - concludes his tour while pointing to a crutch hanging on the wall - “that fifty years ago I finally got to walk again abandoning my crutches forever.” Mario died recently of COVID-19. Hopefully someone will follow in his footsteps to preserve the memory of not only Maria but Mario as well.



Ancient bond of bread and oil,
Appignano del Tronto.

photo by Ettore Emanuele Domicoli

Old streets of Appignano del Tronto.

photo by Maria Pia Allevi



The grey-blue bad-
lands of Appignano
del Tronto.

photo by
Marco Cicconi

The San Giovanni Battista church
after the earthquake in 2017.

photo by
Maria Nazzarena Agostini





Gediz - Bakircay Basins

Our journey ends here, in the western part of Turkey, close to the Aegean sea. The location is part of the larger Izmir metropolitan area and consists of three district municipalities: Dikili, Kinik and Bergama. This fertile agricultural land has been home historically to many ancient civilizations. The area offers a wide range of landscape types, probably the most unique of them is the highlands of the Kozak Plateau with its spectacular pine trees. The natural heritage is complemented with the remains of the noble past: ancient ruins of famous and forgotten cities with temples, royal palaces, theaters and gold mines.

Despite the several treasures you can find in this area, the economic wealth has been declining in the local villages due to very different factors. Building on their rich cultural and natural heritage, the rural communities are trying to generate alternative income sources. They are also hoping to get UNESCO protection for the region, under the name Ida-Madra Geopark.

TRAVEL



Ruins of the Asclepion, the ancient healing center.

The oldest retreat

Just put on your white robe and relax - take a hot bath, a mud bath, cold bath, sunbath, or have a massage with various vegetable oils, ointments, or even wine and honey. You can run, exercise or just soothe your body while enjoying the beautiful natural environment. But it's not just about your body: your mind is also well taken care of. You can go to the library, the theatre (to relish in poetry and music), or you can pray. You sleep in special rooms and later your dreams are interpreted by skilled doctors. It sounds like a very stylish (and very expensive) modern day spa or retreat center, but these words actually describe the ancient Asclepion, whose ruins still can be seen close to Bergama.

The ancient world had several "asclepieia" dedicated to the God of medicine, Asclepius, but definitely the one in Pergamon was one of the best and well known. People arrived from all around the ancient world to seek cures using a special, holistic approach. Today, you can also travel to the majestic ruins of Asclepion, and although there are no doctors for you to discuss your dreams, you can still sit in the amphitheatre or visit the special sleeping chambers and the sacred pools.

But the Asclepion is not just about the past or ruins. Every year there is a one week festival in Bergamon called Kermes. During this very popular event, from children's theatre to traditional theatre plays, from literature and poetry readings to concerts, you can enjoy many different entertaining, and often remedial activities. Yes, you guessed it well: one of the main venues of the event is the theater of Asclepion. In addition, there is another event more closely associated with the original function of the place. Almost a half century ago the Group Psychotherapies Association was formed in Turkey. Since 1984, each year their congress is held in the ancient Asclepion with the participation of international psychodramatists and group psychotherapists from all over the world. So this amazing place has again an important role in curing people. Maybe we can even say that the Asclepion of Bergama is the oldest "functioning" healing center in the world.

“ *the Asclepion of Bergama is the oldest “functioning” healing center in the world* ”



Making the base, the heart of the basket in Bergama.

Baskets and other treasures

“making baskets for him is not just a profession but a lifelong dedication, an art - a passion”

Looking for real treasures? While visiting Bergama, just take a walk at the Ottoman Bazaar. You can find, for example, gold and silver - not as jewelry or coins but as 1.5 mm wide flat strings embroidered over bed sheets, pillow covers, valances or scarfs. This old tradition is called “*tel kirma*” (wire breaking) and done by local women. They use a special needle, usually made of gold or silver itself, with a wide head part and a much thinner other end. By stitching simple + and x shapes with the metal strings, they can create beautiful flower and ethereal geometrical patterns.

But for a rarer treasure you have to walk a little bit further to find Mustafa Pancar - and his unique baskets. Just a few decades ago, baskets were an essential object in every Turkish household. People used different kinds to store laundry, vegetables, and some had distinct shapes and sizes for tobacco, cotton or tea, for both indoor and outdoor use. Unfortunately plastic took over and not just the number of baskets but their makers went down too. Nowadays in Bergama one of the very few masters, if not the last, is Mustafa Pancar. Making baskets for him is not just a profession but a lifelong

dedication, an art - a passion. According to his wife, he never rests. Even going to a coffee shop he asks for branches: he always knits. He started to learn the craft from his grandfather and father when he was only seven years old.

But it's not just the cheap plastic products that are slowly making traditional baskets disappear. Crafting is a very difficult job. It starts, for instance, with the collection and preparation of raw materials. You have to know the right place to find the right plants and also know the right season to harvest them. Then when you start to make a base, which is really the heart of the basket, you have to weave it as tight and precisely as possible, without any errors.

Mustafa Pancar has five grandkids but none of them practices his craft. Maybe this was the main driving force for him to try to pass on his knowledge to others. For years he contributed to several training courses offered to women. They weave baskets to make the products they need but also to contribute to their livelihoods by selling the baskets. Using Mustafa Pancar's own words, after these courses he always feels the “*pride of fulfilling his responsibilities as a master.*”

“ *the people of the Kozak Plateau are just as tough as their precious stone pine trees* ”



Pinus pinea, the stone pine found in the Kozak Plateau.

Rocks and nuts

On a very rocky soil, like the one found in the Kozak Plateau, it's difficult to do any agriculture. Luckily the bluish granite and quartz rocks together with the Mediterranean climate make the plateau a perfect habitat for stone pines. These tall trees with their large canopy cover the whole plateau like giant flowers to make the area look like a dark green paradise from afar. Their remarkable image gives Kozak a fairy-tale atmosphere. But these trees are not just beautiful - harvesting the pines also gave an exceptionally good income for the locals. However it's not an easy living. First you have to wait 10 years until a tree starts producing cones and about 3 years for a cone to be fully ripe. Because of the steeply sloped land and the rocks, the harvest cannot be mechanized - you have to climb the trees, carefully select only the ripe cones, and knock them down with a long, wooden pole (with a hook at the end) called "key". It is not just hard, but sometimes a dangerous occupation, because of the breaking or simply unstable branches high above. Women collect the fallen cones and then set them out to dry and open in the sun. Each tree only yields a few kilograms of pine nuts, and it takes more than 10 kilograms of cones to produce 1 kilo of nuts.

A decade ago the Kozak Plateau was considered one of the world's most important pine nut exporters with its impressive 10% share of the global market. Unfortunately, this is no longer

the case. In the past few years production of pine nuts dramatically dropped, by more than 90 percent allowing the locals to harvest only 150 tons instead of the thousands of tons they had previously. Experts claim that an invasive species, the western conifer seed bug and the drought caused by global warming are responsible for the poor crop while the locals blame the extensive rock mining and the chemicals the other mines use.

Despite this calamity, the people of the Kozak Plateau are just as tough as their precious stone pine trees. They are constantly looking for new income sources. Some villages see promising alternatives in agro and hunting tourism, or just in a different kind of tourism, opening up their homes to guests and inviting them in for local meals. Others are producing and selling handicrafts like unique rugs and carpets or goods like honey, cheese, mushroom or the "blood of the tree", the pine resin. There is also a plan to establish the Kozak Plateau Wildlife Park with caravan parks, tent camps and bungalows built from local wood and stone materials. But experts are also working hard collecting soil, leaves, cones and rainwater samples from the region. They are hoping to find a cure, so that one day the stone pines can offer a good harvest again for the villagers.



Young musicians of Atacma

Neighborhood of musicians

4

If you are invited to a village wedding somewhere around Izmir or Bergama, and the ceremony is about to start, there is a slight chance that you still have to wait. So you wait, until the most important person arrives. It's not the bride. Not the groom. Not even one of the happy parents. It's the clarinet player. The entertainer, who can play his instrument for 6, 7 or even more hours non-stop. These musicians are so well respected, that it can occur that they wake up in the early morning to the noise of the visitors outside, waiting for them to say yes to go for their wedding. These clarinet players are famous abroad too, playing regularly in international festivals, or collaborating with world famous musicians. Interestingly, a lot of them come from a neighborhood in Bergama, called Atmaca.

No wonder, every kid in Atmaca wants to be a musician. And a majority of them do become musicians. Just take a walk in the neighborhood and you can stumble upon kids playing in the streets. They are fond of everything from jazz to rock, from Turkish to Latin music. Since playing instruments is a real

family tradition, from the time they are born, then grow up, they are forming bonds with the culture of music. Teaching starts at a very young age, around 4-5 years. Parents start with the most important thing: rhythm. If the children feel and learn it they build a very good base and they can go to the next level. So they play on drums, side drums or on oil bins if there is nothing else around. When they are a little bit older, they start to learn how to play the trumpet and the clarinet. The chosen method is the easiest and fastest - "ear education", since children's ability to learn by listening is higher.

However the masters feel that getting a proper education would be more beneficial for the kids. From a week long 'Clarinet Camp', which is held in Bergama every summer, to certificate programmes in the Lifelong Education Centre, or studying at the conservatory there are different options to guide and help these young geniuses to aim higher.

“ *parents start with the most important thing: rhythm* ”



Master İsmail is making the parchment (Photo by Hayati Durmuş).

Master and apprentices

The story goes that in the ancient times the Library of Pergamon and the Library of Alexandria (in Egypt) were huge rivals. They both used papyrus to store their precious writings. To stop the rivalry the Egyptians put an embargo on papyrus. The king of Pergamon had no other choice than to look for an alternative for their manuscripts. And he found one, a much more durable substitution: tanned animal skin. This is how parchment was born in Bergama, at least, according to the legends. In a lot of European languages it is still called by the same name: in Italian it's pergamena, Germans and Slovenians say pergament, and so on. Parchment spread very quickly and became a very popular material in the ancient world. It's a material that is still in demand, despite the fact that paper slowly replaced it - the United States' Declaration of Independence was written on parchment in 1779, and nowadays it's a valued item also, for example, in interior design.

Although parchment has appealing features, producing it in the traditional way (avoiding to use electricity and without using any chemicals) is a time and labour consuming work. You have to clean the skin from fat, meat and hair with special knives. Also you have to stretch it over wooden panels working only with wooden nails which won't ruin the skin. To make one single parchment takes 25-30 days total.

The number of experts who are following this ancient method, relying only on arm strength and

the old tools, are very few. Luckily there is still one living master in Bergama - and he has already found his apprentices. Fearing that this very special craft will become extinct in Anatolia, Demet Sağlam Tokbay (conservator and parchment designer), together with her close friend Nesrin Ermis Pavlis, approached İsmail Araç to be his students. At first he left them unanswered for many years. He thought that women could not do this troublesome job that even male apprentices could not continue. But their persistence and determination convinced him, and in 2013 he agreed to teach them. For years they met almost every day, and learnt the craft through often grueling tasks.

In 2017, Master İsmail awarded Demet the title of master. A few years later Nesrin also received her master's title. They do everything to keep the tradition alive: they organise workshops, participate in exhibitions, publish articles and books. Despite the distance between them (Demet lives and works in England, Nesrin in Greece), this strong bond that has been established between the master and the two apprentices over the years, binds them tightly together.

“ *the number of experts who are following this ancient method, relying only on arm strength and the old tools, are very few* ”



Making the yağcıbedir carpet in Çağlan.

photo by
Sacide Arabag



On the streets of Bergama.

photo by
Hüseyin Opruklu



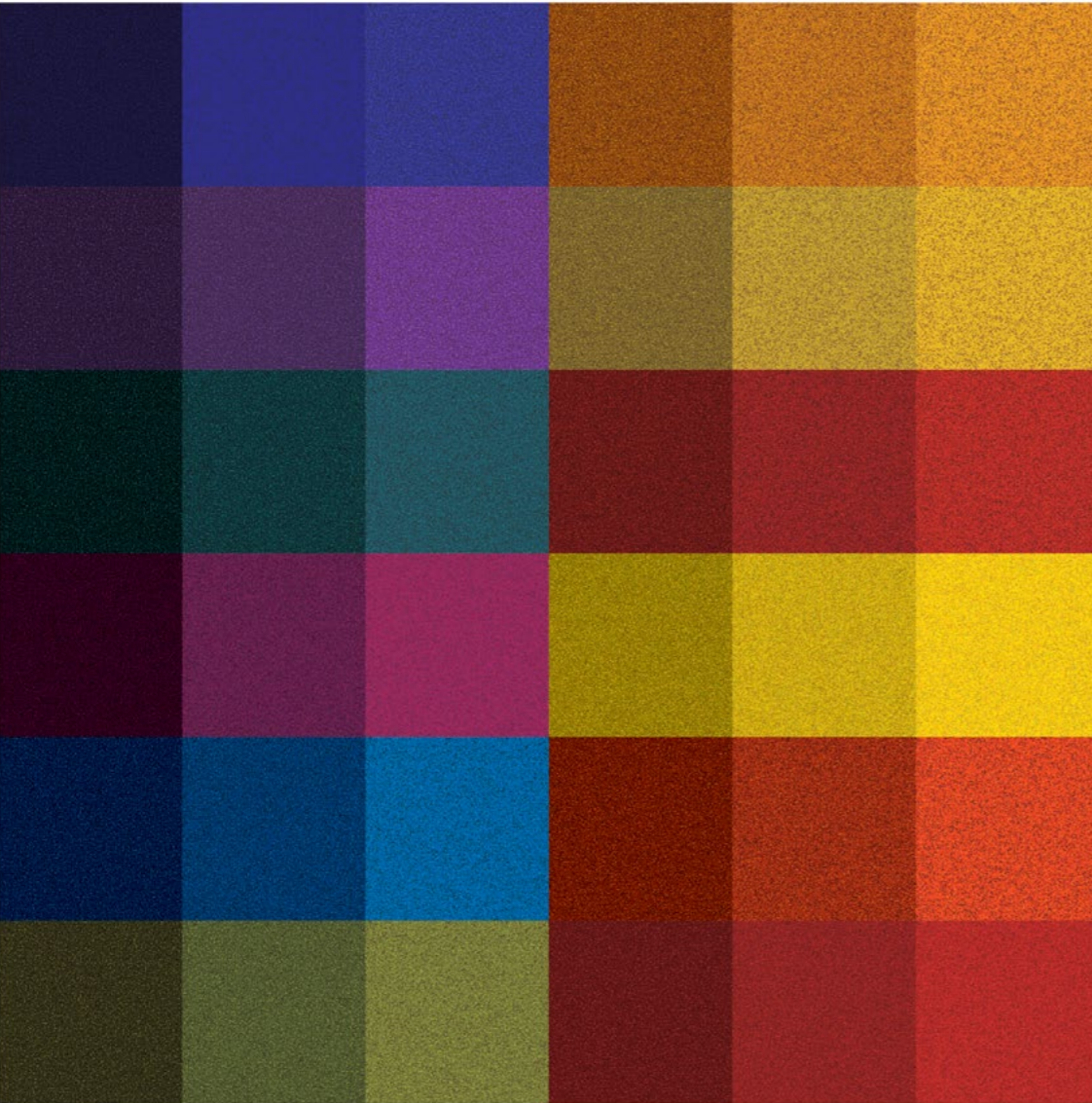
Watching the city from the ancient theater in Bergama.

photo by
Serkan Çolak



Morning walk on the Kozak Plateau.

photo by
Oğuz Tanık



About RURITAGE

All over the world, rural areas tell us the story of a thousand of years long collaboration between nature and human society. These places embody unique examples of cultural and natural heritage, which not only needs to be safeguarded but also recognized as communities of sustainable development. RURITAGE is a four-year-long EU-funded research project, initiated in 2018, which strives to turn rural areas into laboratories to demonstrate natural and cultural heritage as an engine for regeneration.

The six locations introduced in this book joined the RURITAGE project as Replicators, in order to learn effective regeneration strategies. The RURITAGE method is clear: first the project initiated six Systemic Innovation Areas (or so called SIAs), as frameworks to identify unique heritage potential within rural communities. These SIAs are: Pilgrimage; Resilience;

Sustainable Local Food Production; Integrated Landscape Management; Migration; and Art and Festivals. Since there are numerous examples of good practices showing how cultural and natural heritage can function as an engine for development, RURITAGE also selected thirteen rural areas as Role Models, in reference to the six different SIAs. Then, the prosperous practices of the Role Models were analysed and furthermore transferred to six selected Replicators. These Replicators represent local communities within rural territories that are in the process of building their own heritage-led regeneration strategies, although in need of support to improve their skills, knowledge and capacity building.

If you would like to know more about the project and its methodology, you can visit the project website: www.ruritage.eu

RURITAGE 
Heritage for Rural Regeneration

Selecting pine nuts at Kozak Plateau. As in the past, the nuts are extracted and shelled one-by-one, by hand.

Photo by
Sıdıka Konuk



