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Analysis of Hunting Tourism: A Case Study of Slovenia (Prlekija Region)

Analiza turystyki myśliwskiej – studium przypadku Słowenii (region Prlekija)

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Abstract: The exploration of hunting tourism reveals its multifaceted benefits, encompassing nature preservation and tourism expansion. This study delves into the dynamics and prospective trends within hunting tourism, specifically in Prlekija's administrative unit of Gornja Radgona, Slovenia. It commences with a comprehensive international comparative analysis, followed by insightful semi-structured interviews involving key stakeholders within the destination. Hunting tourism emerges as a pivotal facet of tourism within this locale, exhibiting substantial potential for further growth, particularly in terms of diversification, regional integration, and synergy with other tourism offerings. However, it's imperative to address the adverse impacts of hunting tourism on biodiversity. As a counterbalance, the study underscores the increasing global emphasis on sustainable variants of hunting tourism, such as wildlife photography, fostering a more conscientious approach to animal tourism practices.

Keywords: wild animals, hunting tourism, Slovenia, Prlekija region, Gornja Radgona

Streszczenie: Analiza zagadnienia turystyki myśliwskiej ujawnia jej wieloaspektowe korzyści, obejmujące ochronę przyrody i rozwój turystyki. Niniejsze badanie dotyczy tematu dynamiki i perspektywicznych trendów w turystyce myśliwskiej, na przykładzie jednostki administracyjnej Prlekija, Gornja Radgona w Słowenii. Artykuł rozpoczyna kompleksowa międzynarodowa analiza porównawcza, po której następują wnikliwe, częściowo ustrukturyzowane wywiady z udziałem kluczowych interesariuszy w omawianym regionie. Turystyka myśliwska staje się kluczowym aspektem turystyki na tym obszarze, wykazując znaczny potencjał dalszego wzrostu, szczególnie pod względem dywersyfikacji, integracji regionalnej i synergii z innymi ofertami turystycznymi. Konieczne jest jednak zajęcie się kwestią niekorzystnego wpływu turystyki myśliwskiej na różnorodność biologiczną. W badaniu podkreślono rosnący na całym świecie nacisk na rozwój zrównoważonych wariantów turystyki myśliwskiej, takich jak fotografowanie dzikiej przyrody, które sprzyjają upowszechnianiu bardziej świadomego podejścia do praktyk związanych z turystyką przyrodniczą.

Słowa kluczowe: dzika zwierzyna, turystyka myśliwska, Słowenia, region Prlekija, Gornja Radgona

Introduction

Since many tourists today attach great value to the importance of protecting the environment, products with attractions related to high mountains, hunting, farming, botanical, cycling, and other similar forms of tourism represent a means of diversifying the tourist offer (Aksoy and Seven 2022; Makwinda and Ndlovu 2022; Žibert et. al. 2021).

According to Prentović (2005), hunting tourism is a form of travel by users of hunting-tourist services, which assumes the existence of a prescribed available collection of one or more game species in a suitable natural environment adapted for excellent and successful hunting. Ristić (2003) understands hunting tourism in a broader sense as the provision of services for hunters – tourists, the organization of visits to hunting grounds for shooting games, or just observing or filming it against payment of specific contributions prescribed in the price list of the hunting grounds. According to Marić (2003), the hunting tourism product contains three key components:

1. an active (recreational) component allowing physical engagement of hunters in hunting grounds,
2. an ecological component that understands the natural origin of hunting grounds and ensures the necessary conditions for the existence of trophy hunting game and a quality stay for tourists in a healthy natural environment, and
3. an economic component including permanent investments in the breeding of high-quality (trophy) species of game, whereby consumption and more profitable operations are strongly influenced.

Hunting tourists are often willing to travel long distances, often to remote locations, and spend time and significant sums of money to do so (Komppula and Suni 2013). Hunting is mainly discussed as a recreation, sport, or hobby. Hunting can be divided into local hunting, where the hunter hunts in the area of his residence and tourist hunting, where the hunter researches

in an area outside his usual residence, paying for various services to perform his hunt successfully. In recreational hunting (local and tourist), distinction is made between trophy hunting, which is the most profitable for each hunting ground (Pivac et al., 2016). One of the forms of hunting tourism is photo hunting (Dunaway, 2000). It is a more recent form of hunting involving photographing and recording games in their natural environment during feeding, resting, and mating activities (Kokalj, 2010).

Wildlife tourism (including hunting) is an essential component of the tourism industry in many countries, including some South American countries (especially Ecuador), Africa (primarily Kenya, Tanzania, South Africa, and Botswana), Bangladesh, Australia, Indonesia, India, Malaysia, Canada, and several other countries. It represents an industry of high financial value, including customized tourism packages (Blackie 2019; Aksoy and Seven 2022). Wilderness hunting tourism can improve the survival of tribal communities by reducing their dependence on foreign aid. In African countries, in particular, there are examples of tripartite agreements related to wildlife hunting. The purpose is to distribute the final profit among rural communities, private stakeholders, and institutions endeavouring to preserve nature and animal species (GlobeNewswire, 2022). Wilderness tourism is also believed to damage biodiversity (Marchand et al., 2014; Packer et al., 2011; Packer et al., 2009).

Hunting tourism worldwide

Hunting tourism involves hunters travelling to specific areas to hunt wild animals for sport or food (Sheikh and Bermejo, 2019). Meanwhile, wildlife tourism differs slightly from hunting tourism. Wildlife tourism is a form of tourism that emphasizes observing and experiencing wild animals in their natural environment. Tourists go on safaris, bird watching, whale watching, etc., to get close to wild animals in their natural habitat (Lovelock, 2007).

Hunting is regulated in different ways around the world. Countries such as Canada have a controlled licensing system based on the right of every citizen to hunt in his country. Some countries, such as Germany, enforce the district system. This means that hunting rights are attached to the land, and the benefits derived from the wildlife go to the owner of the land, who may be a farmer, community, corporation, or state. In some places, there is a combined licensing system and a district system (such as in Australia for kangaroo shooting), which combines both of the above methods and requires landowners to obtain a license. A community-based system, however, occurs in most parts of the world where hunting is not legislated or regulated by authorities. Here, local communities (municipalities) regulate resource exploration through complex social interactions and regulations to determine hunting rights/areas for community members. These members provide the tourist with a hunting experience (Bauer and Herr 2004). Recreational hunting is widely present in Europe, which is confirmed by the European Federation for Hunting and Conservation in the EU data, which states that in 2010, around 7 million hunters (residents) were registered in European countries.

The global hunting tourism market was estimated at US\$276.2 million in 2020. By 2028, revenue from hunting tourism is expected to grow to US\$1.841.5 million. According to FACE, within the EU alone, hunting may be worth an estimated €16 billion (FACE 2022). From a continental perspective, in 2020, North America had a dominant position in the world-tracking tourism market, followed by Africa, Europe, and the rest of the continents (Coherent Market Insights 2022). Similarly applies to the research in the field of hunting tourism. In countries where hunting is well regulated and essential, such as Canada, the USA, Russia, Germany, France, and the UK, several researches describe the impacts of hunting and how they can be reduced.

The impact of hunting tourism on nature depends on many factors, including management, hunter ethics, local laws and regulations, and the level of control over hunting. In any case, it is essential to ensure sustainable management of wild animals and their habitats and to consider the long-term consequences for the conservation of ecosystems. Intensive hunting can lead to a decline in the populations of endangered animal species, which can have long-term consequences for ecosystems (Woodroffe et al. 2005). On the other hand, controlled hunting can help regulate populations of animals that might otherwise cause overpopulation of different species or cause damage to agricultural land. In some cases, revenues from hunting tourism are also used to preserve natural habitats and protect endangered animal species (Buckley and Mossaz 2015; Matejević et al. 2023).

Hunting tourism in Slovenia

In Slovenian hunting grounds, hunting clubs are responsible for game management, where more than 20,000 hunters are members of hunting clubs. According to the latest official publicly published data, there were 20,107 of them in 2021 (Gov.si 2022). Hunting clubs can annually allocate a certain number of games to Slovenian and foreign hunting guests for shooting. Slovenia is one of the few countries in the European Union where a foreigner who wants to hunt is not required to have a special hunting permit, meaning that there is no control over the scope of this type of tourism or the number of hunting guests in Slovenia. The Hunting Association of Slovenia has proposed several times to introduce a hunting card for foreigners or visiting hunters and thus ensure a transparency in hunting (Lovska zveza Slovenije 2021). Foreign citizens who do not have permanent residence in the Republic of Slovenia can hunt as hunting guests receiving the right to engage in hunting from the operator. The operator must provide professional escorts for hunting guests (PISRS 2021). Hunting

tourism, in particular purpose hunting grounds, is part of sustainable game management. This is organized very professionally. Among the most attractive game species on the hunting grounds are roe deer (*lat. Capreolus capreolus*), fallow deer (*lat. Dama dama*), chamois (*lat. Rupicapra rupicapra*), mouflon (*lat. Ovis aries*), ibex (*lat. Capra ibex*), wild boar (*lat. Sus scrofa*), pheasant (*lat. Phasianus colchicus*), mallard duck (*lat. Anas platyrhynchos*), grey partridge (*lat. Perdix perdix*), and hare (*lat. Lepus*). In addition, limited and controlled brown bear hunting is also permitted by the regulations. The aim of this study is to provide a comprehensive insight into the state of hunting tourism in Prlekija, Slovenia, with the purpose of identifying current trends and potential opportunities for further development. Expected results include a detailed analysis of the state of hunting tourism in the region, identification of key factors of attractiveness for tourists, such as wildlife species, infrastructure, and quality of services offered. Additionally, guidelines for improving sustainability of hunting tourism are expected, emphasizing the preservation of biodiversity and ethical treatment of game, which will contribute to the long-term development of the destination and benefit local communities.

This article is structured as follows: First, in the introductory part, a brief overview of the state of the dimensions of hunting tourism around selected European countries is presented, and at the end, greater emphasis is placed on hunting tourism in Slovenia. The methodological part presents an introduction to comparative (benchmark) analysis and research questions. Follows a comparative description analysis of possible tourism products of selected travel agencies of four public/private agencies that offer hunting tourism as their product. The continuation presents the findings of the research conducted by interviewing the leading representatives of hunting clubs in Slovenia, specifically in one of the regions – Prlekija, an administrative unit of Gornja Radgona. The paper is concluded with

a presentation of the collection of different trends in the development of hunting tourism.

1. Materials and Methods

1.1. Comparative Analysis of International Case Studies

The initial phase of the research paper involves a comparative analysis of international case studies. This step is crucial as it offers insights into how hunting tourism products are offered globally, serving as a valuable reference point before implementing any changes, measures, or new strategies. Such comparative analyses allow for a deeper understanding of the operations of other institutions, providing a foundation for the introduction of necessary modifications (Mihajlović 2002).

1.2. Research Questions

In the research deals with two research questions:

RQ1: To what extent the administrative unit of Gornja Radgona is prepared for hunting tourism, given the existing offer and (natural) conditions?

Our first research question delves into the preparedness of the Gornja Radgona administrative unit for hunting tourism, taking into account the current offerings and natural conditions. To adequately address this inquiry, it is crucial to examine the state of natural resources and other relevant factors within the administrative unit.

The extent of forest coverage plays a pivotal role in assessing the suitability of an area for hunting activities. Data obtained from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia reveals that in the Gornja Radgona administrative unit, a significant portion of the area exhibits forest coverage of up to 25% (Zavod za gozdove Slovenije 2024). In contrast, the Kočevje administrative unit, situated in the forested region of southeast Slovenia, boasts areas where forest coverage exceeds 90% of the total land area (Zavod za gozdove Slovenije 2024). This stark contrast in forest coverage between the two

administrative units may significantly influence the hunting opportunities available, with higher forest coverage areas typically offering more favorable conditions for hunting wildlife species such as wolves, bears, and lynxes.

In light of these disparities in forest coverage, it is imperative to evaluate how the existing natural resources, including forested areas, contribute to the overall potential for hunting tourism development in the Gornja Radgona administrative unit. Additionally, an analysis of other relevant resources, such as wildlife populations and infrastructure, will provide valuable insights into the readiness of the area to accommodate hunting tourism activities.

RQ2: What is the cooperation between the hunting clubs with local stakeholders in the field of hunting tourism offer?

One of the most crucial requirements for the effective development of tourism in a particular region or administrative area is cooperation and networking. When comparing statistic data about the average length of stay and related positive multiplicative effects, this improves the quality of pertinent service activities and the interest of guests, who are effectively persuaded by tourism-related institutions to participate in various activities with the goal of extending the guest stay as long as possible.

We assume that the current situation in the administrative unit of Gornja Radgona regarding the cooperation of specific hunting clubs and larger Associations of Hunting Families with local tourism clubs and providers shows that present cooperation is not evident enough to be understood as a long-range networking with long-term effects.

1.2.1. Interviews

In the continuation, the results of interviews conducted between representatives of the clubs of hunting families of the Prlekija region and members of hunting clubs (elders) located in Prlekija are presented, more precisely, within the administrative unit of Gornja Radgona (hunting clubs/

families of Apače, Gornja Radgona, Radenci, Negova and Videm ob Ščavnici; clubs of hunting clubs of the Prlekija region). In the field of tourism, the research included the representatives of local public institutions dealing with tourism, culture, and promotion activities – the Kultprotur Institute from Gornja Radgona and the Institute for the Development of Rural Life Apače. The research also included tourist clubs or their representatives from the societies Klopotec Kapela, Majolka Zbigovci and Radenci.

In our case, we conducted semi-structured interviews with CEOs or leaders of local tourist clubs, as well as senior members of hunting-tourism-focused local hunting groups. The interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and took place in a variety of settings, including hunting lodges, tourism associations' main offices, and other well-known, prearranged locales. The majority of the questions that were posed concerned the state of natural resources and other resources in general, as well as hunting tourism and the cooperation of hunting-related organizations with regional tourism providers. Eleven interviews were done in all, with representatives from the six most significant/active local tourism associations, the regional/subregional hunting club, two public institutions that concentrate on local tourism development, and three smaller local tourism associations rounding out the group.

Along with the aforementioned questions (depending on the interviewee and the club they belong to), different specific questions were also asked in the cases of the Association of hunting families of the Prlekija region and tourist associations. These questions included information about the types of tourism being offered, how to train staff in case new hunting tourism opportunities are implemented, and how to persuade various potential guests.

1.2.2. Data Sources for Analysis

The research took place in May and June 2022. It was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews.

The administrative unit (AU) of Gornja Radgona includes the municipalities of Apače, Gornja Radgona, Radenci, and Sveti Jurij ob Ščavnica. The area covers 58 cadastral areas and 100 settlements. 25,500 inhabitants live in this area. Territorially, it is located in the northeastern part of the Republic of Slovenia. It is a border administrative unit, as it borders Austria in the north (Adam 2012).

Five hunting clubs (HC) operate in UA Gornja Radgona. These are HC of Apače, Gornja Radgona, Negova, Radenci and Videm ob Ščavnici. They are connected into the Association of Prlekija Hunting Families. In total, over 420 members are registered in all the mentioned HCs.

2. International Comparative of Possible Tourism Products of Selected Travel Agencies Analysis

The initial segment of our analysis involves comparing the offerings of four hunting tourism providers based on the 7P marketing mix principle. This approach entails evaluating various aspects such as products,

pricing, locations, promotional strategies, personnel, physical evidence, and processes. Figure 1 illustrates the geographical positions of the agencies included in our comparative analysis, adapted from the EU map in 2023.

2.1. Structuring Key Attributes and Products of Selected Hunting Destinations

In Figure 1, marked with numbers 1 through 4, are the locations and hunting grounds of four selected agencies offering hunting tourism experiences:

1. Ljubljana, Slovenia, serves as the headquarters for the private agency Pasat, d. o. o. This agency operates its hunting grounds in Croatia, situated in lowland areas along the Drava and Sava rivers. The benchmark analysis focused on roe deer hunting from September to January.
2. The headquarters and hunting ground of the public enterprise Vojvodinašume are situated in Vojvodina, Serbia. Hunting takes place in the Deliblatska Peščara and Vršačka planina hunting grounds in northeastern Serbia. The analysis evaluated a three-day hunt for 75 wild boars for a group of 10-13 hunters.

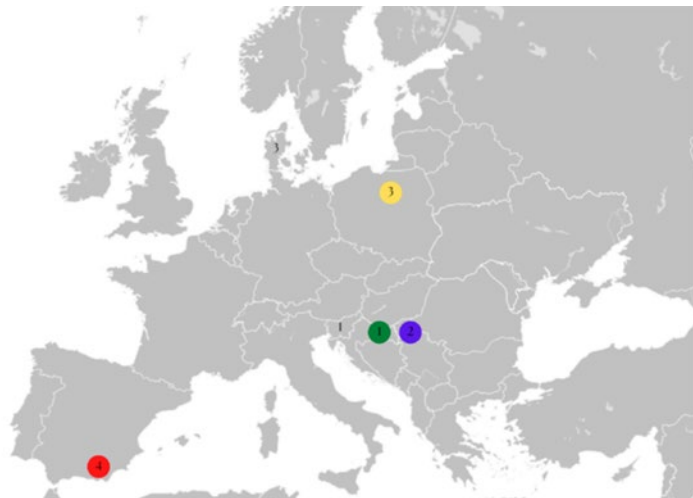


Figure 1. Positions of the agencies included in the benchmark analysis, source: Adapted from EU map, 2023

3. Denmark is the base of operations for the travel agency Limpopo & Diana Hunting Tours, which has hunting grounds near Brodnica, Poland. The benchmark analysis assessed a four-day hunting experience, offering wild boar or deer hunting in winter with the opportunity to observe elk.
4. IberHunting, based in Spain, offers guided hunting experiences across various continents. The analysis focused on a five-day hunt for ibex and red deer, conducted from mid-October to mid-February.

2.2. Pricing of Hunting Tourism Arrangements

Each agency offers distinct pricing structures for their hunting tourism packages:

Slovenia/Croatia (number 1): The price of a hunting day amounts to €150. The price includes hunting with a local professional hunter, the entire board in a hunting lodge, transportation during the hunting day, use of hunting facilities, essential preparation of the trophy, and accident insurance for the client. The price does not include the issuance of an annual hunting license (valued at €60), health insurance, drink, tip, and shooting tax, which is paid according to the trophy value in CIC (CIC points represent a scoring system used by the International Council for Game and Wildlife Conservation, known in French as Conseil International de la Chasse et de la Conservation du Gibier) points. The organizer of the arrangement – Slovenian tourist agency Pasat d. o. o. states specific conditions in their own promotional text (accessible online), such as that in case of a missed shot at a deer is charged with €150, and a wounded deer is charged with 50% of the guide's estimated trophy value and 50% of the game value (Pasat n.d.).

Serbia (number 2): The daily hunting arrangement for a group of 10 hunters' costs around €7,548. An additional fee of around €2,500 is charged for each other hunter. The price includes the entire organization of the hunt, guide, drivers, hunting

dogs, transport by tractor, loot, final trophy, shooting and missed shot, transportation to/from the airport and to the hunting lodge, accommodation in the hunting lodge (entire board), drinks (Vojvodinašume 2017).

Denmark/Poland (number 3): The arrangement costs €1,350 per person. The price includes four days of accommodation (full board), three days of combined group hunting, unlimited hunting of deer of various species and wild boars, organization costs, transportation, license fees, related costs, trophy processing, and a translator. The price does not include the hunted game on individual hunts, transport during separate hunts (approx. €67.5 per hunter/day), mandatory European liability insurance (€5.5), tourist insurance, health insurance, tips, sale of game meat and skins (price/kg listed on the provider's website) (Limpopo & Diana Hunting Tours 2018).

Spain (number 4): The price of the entire arrangement is not given on the provider's website; the submission of an inquiry is required. The price includes ibex and red deer hunting, hunting permit, liability insurance, four days of hunting, five days of the overnight stay (entire board) in a single room, English-speaking hunting guide, transportation during the hunt, and to/from Alicante, Almería or Murcia airports. The price does not include participation for non-hunters (€225/day), alcoholic beverages, non-meal beverages, processing and shipping of trophies, tips, and transportation to/from other airports (IberHunting 2022).

2.3. Promotional strategies

Table 1 outlines the promotional activities employed by each agency, including websites, email, phone, social media profiles, and YouTube channels.

2.4. Availability of Tourism Activities

All four agencies report data on hunting trophies and show program price lists.

Table 1. Promotional activities of agencies and public institutions used to advertise hunting tourism activities

	Slovenia / Croatia (No. 1)	Serbia (No. 2)	Denmark / Poland (No. 3)	Spain (No. 4)
Own website	x	x	x	x
E-mail	x	x	x	x
Phone Number	x	x	x	x
Fax number		x		
Own Youtube channel		x	x	x
Own Linked In profile		x	x	
Own Facebook profile		x	x	x
Own Instagram profile			x	x
Own Twitter profile				x

2.5. Activation Process of Tourism Products

While the agencies from Slovenia/Croatia and Serbia do not report on the activity of the hunting tourism process, the agency from Denmark describes the process in the following way: The group hunt begins around dawn with a meeting where the chief ranger presents the hunting process and highlights vital safety procedures and hunting rules. Group-guided hunting takes place until noon. Then, each of the hunters is assigned their own (individual) guide, and the hunt continues in the form of pursuing wild boar or (red) deer. The Spanish agency describes the course of the activity with the following description: The hunting arrangement begins with the guest's arrival at the airport closest to the hunting ground (Almería, it can also be Murcia (San Javier) or Alicante). Upon arrival, the guest meets with a representative of the agency, who accompanies him throughout the trip – decides, and takes care of hunting. After arranging the documentation related to the weapon (customs), the transfer to the hotel follows. Guests can also borrow weapons. The hunt starts in the early hours of the morning. It is a mountain hunt in which the hunter and the guide help each other with observation (binoculars). Observation is carried out following the instructions of the compass, who demonstrates his knowledge in the field. The arrangement can

be adjusted according to the guest's physical condition (IberHunting 2022).

The IberHunting agency, as the only one among those analyzed, does not list the prices of the entire arrangement on its website, which means that it is necessary to submit a request for such information using an electronic form. All offers are made during legal hunting seasons. Services or the activities included in the price of the presented arrangements are relatively similar, namely organized hunting, a local professional hunter (as a guest's companion), overnight stay with entire board in hunting lodges/hotels, transportation, costs for using hunting facilities, official documents, essential preparation looted trophies, accident insurance for guests, sometimes a translator is also included in the offer. The Vovjodinašume Public Enterprise adds to its price also hounds, the use of hunting dogs, and, as the only one among those presented, every shot and missed game shot. On the other hand, as a rule, other services and offers are subject to an additional charge, such as guest health insurance, tips, shooting tax based on the trophy value in CIC points, accommodation without hunting or for non-hunters, tourist insurance, cancellation costs, costs from the sale of venison and hides, where the purchase is possible, and sending trophies. The analysed hunting arrangements take place in hunting grounds of various natural resources (some are under

state management), both in lowland hunting grounds and, for example, in the highlands.

3. Results - Analysis of the State of Hunting Tourism in the Area of Prlekija, an Administrative Unit of Gornja Radgona

The species and population of wild animals are key factors for tourists' attractiveness of hunting grounds. In Table 2, different species of wild animals by individual HC hunting grounds are shown. The most interesting game for tourists is the roe deer, for which a third or a quarter of the shooting plan is allocated for tourist hunting. Among the other species, the fox can be noticed, temporarily also the red deer is on the increase. There is not as much demand for other types.

The hunting grounds in AU Gornja Radgona include areas that belong to various hunting clubs: HC Apače (in the municipality of Apače), Gornja Radgona, Negova (both in the municipality of Gornja Radgona), Radenci (in the municipality of Radenci), and Videm ob Ščavnici (in the municipality of Sveti Jurij ob Ščavnici). These areas cover a range of 2,540 to 5,000 hectares (refer to Figure 2). Hunting grounds are generally lowland or hilly, with evenly distributed forests and fields bordering the Mura and Ščavnica rivers. Among the wild animals present in AU Gornja Radgona, feathered and small game, pheasant, rabbit, mallard duck, and roe deer predominate. HC Radenci also offers wild boar hunting. The most interesting for tourists is

the roe deer, for which a third or a quarter of the shooting plan is allocated for tourist hunting.

According to interviews, the demand for hunting tourism is high in the AU Gornja Radgona. To a large extent, hunting tourism is already booked in advance, as interested parties make a reservation for the following year shortly after the visit. It can be concluded that there are no problems with promotion. In addition, the implementation of hunting tourism is favourably influenced by the countryside, forests, and nature, which is unspoiled and interesting for tourism. Water levels and the amount of catch are adequate. The area of AU Gornja Radgona includes several lakes and stagnant waters, which are also interesting for fishing related to hunting. Hunting guests are provided with quality games for shooting, experienced gamekeepers, accommodation in hunting lodges, and local cuisine based on the game. There are also restrictions, such as the costs of maintaining hunting lodges, electricity and petroleum products (gas), the prescribed shooting quota set by the Hunting Association of Slovenia, and the requirements of HA members to prevent the loss of hunting opportunities. In the wine-growing region, large areas are fenced off due to the harvesting of vines, and as a result, there is a lack of space for the typical passage of the game. In certain HAs, it is difficult to find suitable guides due to the lack of knowledge of specific foreign languages and the age of the members of the principles. In addition, the habitat

Table 2. Species of wild animals by individual HC hunting grounds

	Wild animals present
HC Apače	Feathered game, pheasant, hare, roe deer.
HC Gornja Radgona	Roe deer, wild boar, pheasant, hare.
HC Negova	Roe deer, pheasant, hare; transiently also wild boars and foxes.
HC Radenci	Mainly roe deer, transiently also red deer and, in recent years, wild boars. Small game, pheasant, rabbit, and mallard duck.
HC Videm ob Ščavnici	Dominated by roe deer (mainly trophy) and small game: pheasant, hare, mallard duck. Wild boar and red deer are transiently present (on the increase). However, the number of beavers, which cause damage to forest areas, is increasing.

Source: personal communication, 2022.



Figure 2. Locations of the Prlekija region and within it the administrative unit of Gornja Radgona.
Source: Adapted from Slo map 2023

of small game is shrinking due to agricultural policy, and unrest in hunting grounds is increasing. As a result, wild animals significantly change their living habits.

The guests/tourists are mostly hunters from Austria, who are members of the local hunting regions and rarely hunt at home due to high prices. They come from a radius of 300 to 750 kilometres (Austrian Tyrol). When performing, they value the quality of the deer/trophies, respect in the mutual relationship (customer-hunter), the authenticity of the hunting experience, and the care for the preservation of hunting customs, to which they pay particular attention. Hunting families have not yet started cooperating with tourism providers in the area. The reason is the stability of the guest structure since regular guests have been coming for a long time (more than 10, 20 years) and entrust the organization of the tourist experience to hunting clubs. But as representatives of hunting clubs say, they have no problems with cooperation. The cooperation would be possible if more could be got out of the offer. The representatives of tourism associations share the same opinion. They see collaboration with hunting clubs as an opportunity to present the hunting offer within the framework of the fairs they

organize. Also, connection with travel agencies would be necessary if the hunting product is an established product. According to the interlocutors, hunting tourism could significantly improve the visibility of the destination, as it brings many multiplier effects. The results of the survey showed that hunting tourists in the destination benefits from spending the night in hunting lodges, nearby catering/accommodation facilities, on tourist farms and in private rooms nearby, etc., seeing the surrounding attractions, enjoying local food and specialities, visit wine cellars, benefit the services of a nearby health resort; they are engaged in cycling, rafting, etc.

Representatives of hunting clubs and tourist organizations in AU Gornja Radgona highlight the possibility of further development of hunting tourism, mainly through cooperation with tourist agencies, which would offer and promote their tourist products hunting tourism more widely. They propose the establishment of glamping with mobile homes in the area of the Lisjakova Struga and Negova lake, which would provide such tourists with all the necessary equipment. According to the findings of the research, the entire hunting tourism in the area of AU Gornja Radgona takes place via or under the jurisdiction of local HAs

and indirectly through the Hunting Association of Prlekija. They have many years of experience with hunting tourism, as HAs from the area of AU Gornja Radgona started working soon after their establishment, in the 40s of the last century. The share gradually increased after 1975.

For hunting tourism to be practised legally, specific conditions must be met. The conditions are strict, as the hunter who participates in hunting tourism must be nominated by the rest of the membership, be resourceful, be able to accurately assess the game according to the number of CIC points, have a good knowledge of the structure of the guests, be professional and experienced, know the terrain and know that the rifle is not intended for activities other than hunting. Of the official documents, a passing hunting test and an acquired ID card and weapon license are required. During hunting tourism activities, guests must pay for entrance to the hunting ground – this covers management and maintenance costs. The guest is required to have a gun license, a respectful attitude towards wildlife and a sense of responsibility. The guest may not shoot without the guide's knowledge. Before entering the hunting grounds, a weapon test with three shots at the target is mandatory. All data related to retention in the hunting grounds and looting must be recorded and kept in official records at the internal and national levels.

Conclusions

According to the interviewees, hunting tourism represents one of the key sources of funding for HAs and is present in all Slovenian HAs. According to the estimates of the interlocutors, it accounts for 33% to 50% of the Hunting family's revenues. The money obtained is generally used to cover the costs of feeding and improving the living conditions of wild animals. The rule applies that it is necessary to return all, or as much as possible, resources obtained from wild game to nature. Sustainable hunting leads to the preservation

of wild animals, including endangered species. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature, hunting is a legitimate management tool for the conservation of animal species and encourages it. It is important to regularly cooperate with major hunting organizations to promote ethical hunting and combat inhumane practices (Coherent Market Insights 2022).

For tourists, visiting zoos, aquariums and similar establishments with live animals is less and less acceptable. People perceive, that most of today's animals prefer to live in their natural environment. They often feel the urge to pay more to see animals in the wild. There is increasing interest in learning about local biodiversity and habitats. It seems more and more important to travel with an educated local guide, as the guest can ask questions and learn how to help preserve certain animal species or the environment in general, which connects with the values of tourists and increases the individual's involvement in the experience (CBI Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.).

Social networks have a great influence on tourism in nature and wilderness, especially among tourists belonging to generations Y and Z. This type of individuals share their experiences with their followers on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook or TripAdvisor. Tourist organizations and providers also set up their accounts and use them to inform or advertise their activities. Real-time engagement with past, current and future visitors and direct feedback from tourists is important here. Technical equipment is also improving, tourists are interested in quality photos of the environment that they can publish or show to their friends. In the last few years, social networks have been increasingly informing users about animal abuse or illegal activities related to them. Virtual reality (VR) technology, applications for smart devices and interactive guides are also growing in importance as they all enhance the tourist experience. These tools help with educational information and explain safety measures. It is also

crucial that providers focus on partnerships with smaller tour operators. The aim of this is to avoid standard package travel offers and create a more personal tourist arrangement that appeals to the individual tourist or family and creates a unique experience. It is a good idea to offer tourists the possibility of accreditation when publishing their photos on the providers' websites or profiles on social networks. In addition, it is important to prove the sustainable orientation of the provider and the offer with accredited certificates. An example of such a certificate is the Fair-Trade Tourism certificate, with which the provider demonstrates social, economic and environmental sustainability, as well as sustainability in the area of accommodation, activities and food and beverages (CBI Ministry of Foreign Affairs n.d.).

In the field of hunting tourism, the potential is offered in the sphere of education. Related fields of study are being developed in some countries in the direction of hunting tourism. As an example, it is possible to highlight the University of Novi Sad in Serbia, which has a chair at the Faculty of Science within the Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management, whose members work in the field of hunting tourism, hunting, education, production and game protection, planning annual hunting plans, game habitats and geographic information systems (University of Novi Sad 2019).

In our further researches, the field of hunting tourism, could be applied also to other Slovenian regions, which would allow comparisons, even with comparable areas outside Slovenia. Hunting tourism certainly has a potential for further development, especially in terms of diversification rural areas.

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