The Triglav National Park: A Century-Long Project

Carolin Roeder

Summary

The Triglav National Park, situated in the Julian Alps, comprises three percent of Slovenia's territory. While excluding the actual Mount Triglav, Slovenia's highest mountain and foremost national symbol, it consists of cultural landscapes where land use and development is allowed and higher alpine zones where conservation is strictly enforced. Before it was founded in 1981, smaller nature reserves had already been established during the Yugoslav monarchy and socialist Yugoslavia. Conflicts between conservationists and local peasants in this populated area were present from the beginning and continue even today. The park is important both for the national preservation scheme and the tourist industry.

The Triglav National Park, situated in the Julian Alps in Slovenia close to the border with Italy and Austria, is named after the country's highest peak. Although the present-day park boundaries were established in 1981 under the socialist regime in Yugoslavia, the origins of nature protection in the Julian Alps date back to the Habsburg monarchy. Despite the changes of political systems and national boundaries, the highlands of the Julian Alps were always of particular interest to scientists and conservationists. The idea of a national park in the Julian Alps was appealing enough to survive imperial dissolution, border changes, and two world wars.

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Triglav from the South. In the valley of Veljo Polje, Vodnikov Dom is visible, a mountain hut operated by the Slovenian Alpine Club.

2012 Suzana Jerebič

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In 1907, professor of seismology Albin Belar was commissioned by the Habsburg administration to compile a list of natural monuments worth protecting. Among others, he proposed setting aside the Valley of the Seven Lakes below the Triglav, which he deemed of interest for science and, due to its low economic value, easy to protect. Nevertheless, concrete protective measures were not established until after the Yugoslav monarchy succeeded the Habsburg reign. In 1924, the conservationists of the Museum Society's Department for Nature Protection in Ljubljana and the Slovenian Alpine Club signed a lease agreement with the Forest Directorate which set aside the Valley of the Seven Lakes with the understanding that all institutions involved would support the project of the "Alpine Protection Park." However, enforcement of conservation measures was poor. Peasants insisted on their usage rights of the pastures, and tourists, too, were all too often inclined to walk off the beaten tracks.

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"Forbidden" – a rather traditional sign in the Triglav National Park on Mangart Pass, the highest mountain pass in Slovenia.

2009 Carolin Roeder

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Over the course of the twentieth century, and increasingly after the Second World War when Slovenia was a republic in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, emerging narratives of Slovenian national identity drew on the symbolic power of the Alps. National identity thus secured political and public interest in the Triglav area, with the peak becoming Slovenia's prime national symbol. Nonetheless, political inertia and competing interests between farmers, the park administration, local city governments, and the central government would impede conservation measures for decades to come.

In 1961, the Slovenian parliament established the Triglav National Park, yet it did not even come close to the standards set by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). It covered only 2,000 hectares and remained relatively open for economic activities. When the national park was extended in 1981, the special law on the Triglav National Park distinguished between two zones of different protection levels (core and periphery) that corresponded to the IUCN categories II (National Park) and V (Protected Landscape).

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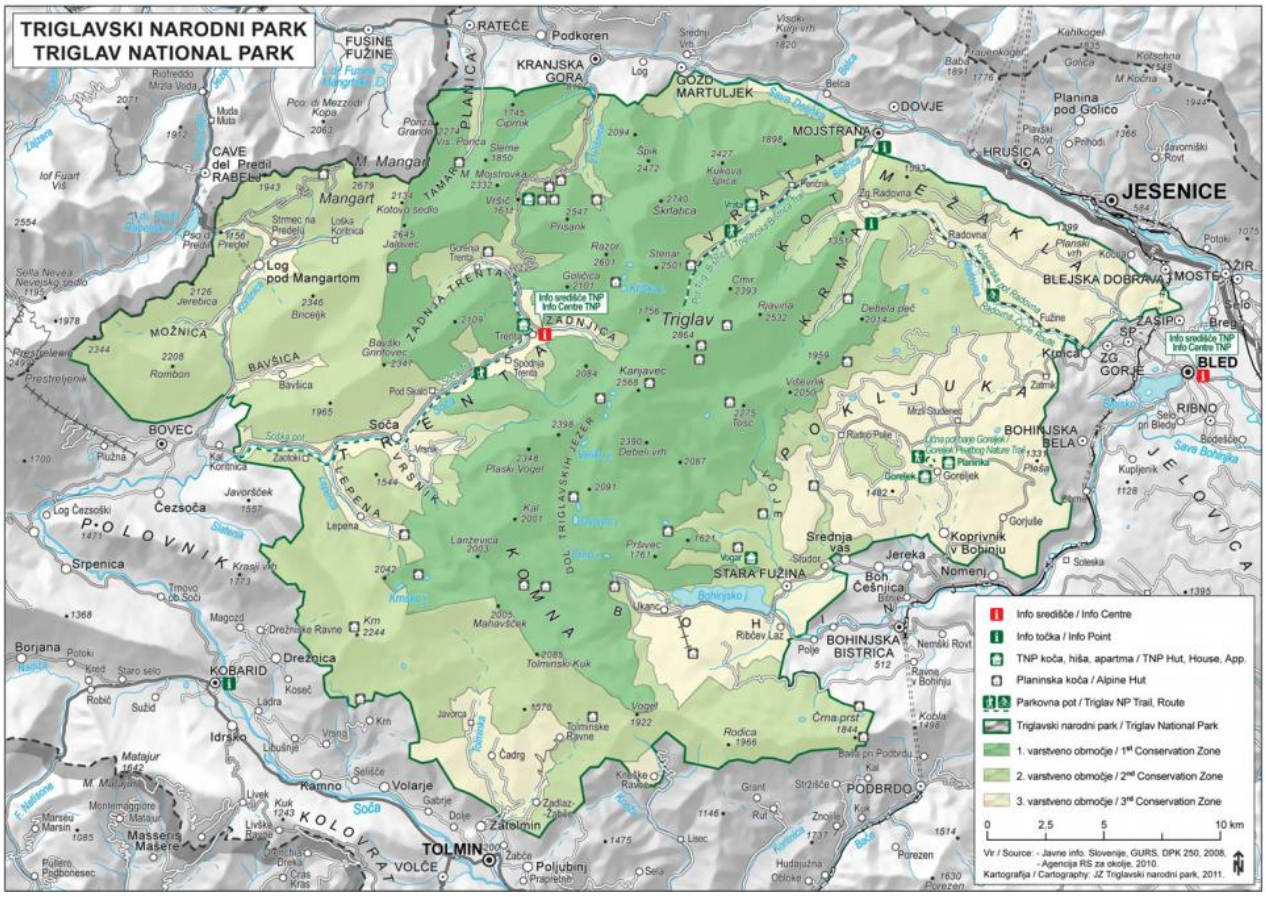

Map of Triglav National Park

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Slovenia became independent in 1991; it was time to replace the out-dated regulations. Severe debates over the future use of the park had polarized politicians, the public, and non-governmental organizations. Discussions about restoring the previous ownership of parts of the park linked conservation to the question of the role and rights of the church (which owns large parts of the park's territory) in the postsocialist society and denationalization in general. It took a decade of negotiation before a new law concerning the Triglav National Park was finally passed in 2010.

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National Parks in Time and Space

Further readings:

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- Skoberne, Peter, “Prispevek poznavanju vloge Albina Belarja na področju varstva narave na Slovenskem,” *Annales, Series Historia Naturalis* 21, no. 1 (2011): 97–110.

Related links:

- Official website of the Triglav National Park
  http://www.tnp.si/national_park/
- 360 degree pictures of the Triglav National Park
  http://www.burger.si/TriglavNationalPark/TriglavskiNarodniParkENG.htm
- Triglav National Park on Protected Planet
  http://www.protectedplanet.net/sites/Triglavski_Narodni_Park_National_Park

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Carolin Firouzeh Roeder is a PhD student at the Department of History at Harvard University. Her dissertation project is a transnational history of mountaineering which traces networks between mountaineers of western and eastern Europe from 1900 to the end of the Cold War. She holds a BA in Slavic Languages from the University of Regensburg and an MA in East European Studies and Research from the University of Bologna. Focusing on central and eastern Europe, her research interests include the history of exploration and empire, environmental history, and alpine history.

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