

## **WP4**

# **Platy limestone as cultural heritage**

## **Supplement 3.II**

### **Cross-border issues in conservation and restoration of platy limestone**

## **Appendix 3.II.2**

### **Final report for the project area in Slovenia (Kras)**

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## 1. Introduction

In Kras, which was in-depth researched within the frame of the project RoofOfRock – Limestone as the common denominator of natural and cultural heritage along the karstified part of the Adriatic coast – platy limestone was used for vernacular architecture, traditionally built *hiške*, larger homesteads and the adjoining outbuildings. Numerous profane, mostly privately owned buildings and also several sacral buildings had at least one integral part (like roof, for example) built of platy limestone.

However, during the research of the selected show cases and representative objects became obvious the differences between the legal status of the protection between the sacral and vernacular architecture. Sacral buildings, catholic churches, made at least partially of platy limestone are in major part protected as the cultural heritage monuments, while the rural architecture is mostly without any official protection and is therefore more exposed to decay and to invasive renovations, disregarding the original techniques and the original material. The sacral buildings are mostly still in use and are as a rule in the property of the Roman Catholic Church of Slovenia. A major part of them is officially registered in the Cultural Heritage Register and are therefore under the supervision of the responsible cultural heritage institution. In the case of Kras region are responsible regional offices of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia in Nova Gorica and Piran.



Figure 1  
Divača, Štrekelj homestead, reconstructed in a Museum of Slovenian Film Actors (photo Mitja Guštin, 2015).

## 2. The legal status of heritage protection

In the whole eastern Adriatic area, treated in the frame of the RoofOfRock project, platy limestone has been one of the main elements in the vernacular architecture, although it has not achieved any special status within national conservation legislation so far. The main problem in the protection of platy limestone monuments is in all probability the lack of concern for "minor" rural architecture, which led to the neglecting, disrespecting and unrecognized of the cultural and social values of it. The traditional rural architecture hardly competes with the modern architecture, present-day needs, cheap and widely available modern materials and, after all, with the latest construction techniques.

Without a proper legal frame it is difficult to cope with the issues of renovation and conservation of the traditional architecture (built of platy limestone), what results in the inevitable fact that many structures of vernacular heritage have been decaying and are now devastated. In some cases, traditional buildings and structures were subjected to unprofessional restoration with no official institutional supervision and without the collaboration of the experts. The ignorance could lead even in the inadequate renovation in the style of a kind of pseudo-traditional anachronistic architecture. The original vernacular heritage has therefore lost its inner self in many cases.

In Slovenia the cultural heritage is regulated through the national legislation. For the protection and maintenance of architectural monuments Ministry of Culture and its network of offices are responsible. The headline act that regulates the cultural heritage is the *Cultural Heritage Protection Act* (Uradni list Republike Slovenije [Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia], no. 16/08, 123/08, 8/11 – ORZVKD 39, 90/12 and 111/13)), which was passed in 2008, the last changes were implemented in 2013. It appoints the content and objectives of heritage protection, especially through public interest.

For the maintenance and protection of the cultural heritage Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia (<http://www.zvkds.si/en/ipchs/ipchs/about-ipchs/>) is responsible. The Institute has seven regional offices, for the karstic region the offices at Nova Gorica and Piran are competent, and also the Centre for Preventive Archaeology and Restoration Centre. The latter is mainly in charge for the conservational and restoration issues, regarding the buildings in public property. It is strictly against the law to renovate the declared cultural heritage without the proper conservation plan confirmed by official heritage authorities. For the state-owned monuments, the national Restoration Centre prepares a conservation plan, while for monuments in the private ownership the owners have to order the conservation plan from Restoration Centre or from private institution with the concession and pay for that out of their own pocket.

One of the main activities of the Institute for the Protection of Cultural Heritage of Slovenia is to ensure a uniform system of protection for immovable heritage in the case of construction of new and the reconstruction of existing residential and other objects, together with the implementation of entire works, which may permanently, temporarily or occasionally affect the protection regime, conservation and maintenance of the heritage.

Each immovable cultural heritage is registered in the Register of the Immovable Cultural Heritage, which is available online (<http://rkd.situla.org/>) and to each registered unit is given its evidence number (EŠD), which had to be implemented also in the description sheets of the representative buildings and selected show cases (see Elaborate I, Annex 3 and list of documented objects).



Figure 2

Žirje, a noble, well-preserved homestead. The main house is on the right and dates into 1790 (photo Mitja Guštin 2013)

The Protection Act distinguishes between three levels of the status of the immovable cultural heritage:

- cultural heritage structures (only listed in the Cultural Heritage Register, but without any proper protection, only exterior, gauge and the primary purpose of the building have to be protected; for example: homestead “Pri Polhovih”, Dutovlje 111, EŠD 9131, homestead “Pri Petrovih”, Tupelče 4, EŠD 9459);
- the local monument (of the special importance for the local community, declared by the municipal authorities, for example: Homestead “Pri Blaževih”, Gorenje pri Divači, EŠD 7338, homestead “Škrateljnova”, Divača, EŠD 94) and
- national monument (of the special importance for the whole nation, declared by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia on the proposal of the Ministry of Culture; for example karstic homestead “Pr’Betanci” in Betanja at Škocjan, EŠD 9107).

Not only singular monument, but also the whole cultural heritage site can be listed as the immovable cultural heritage. As an integral part of the protected traditional village for example, homestead “Pri Šekljetovih”, Skopo 58 is listed. Although the building itself is unprotected, it has gained its status as an indivisible, integral part of the village structure. The

same forms of protection were declared also for the homesteads at the address Kopriva 29, Kopriva and “Pri Krnelovih”, Volčji Grad 61 that are documented among the representative objects (see List of documented objects).

The registered immovable heritage monuments (disregarding the level of protection) are of private (owned by families for generations, local cultural associations) as well as of public property (national, municipal, ownership of sacral institution and other public institutions or offices).

Unfortunately, only few buildings of the rural vernacular architecture are fully legally protected. In Kras, for example, homestead “Pr’Vncku” in Matavun 15, “Pr’Betanci” in Betanja 2 and Jakopin barn in Škocjan 7 are fully protected and have gained the status of the national monuments because they are an integral part of a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

### 3. The legal representative/owner

During the process of collecting the data about the buildings, selected as the representative objects or show cases, was of the special importance the contact with the building owner or legal representative. Especially private owners were more than glad to cooperate with RoofOfRock descriptors. In general, they showed a lot of interest in our project and have been looking forward for project results. As all of them own a building that is mainly made of platy limestone, they showed a particular interest especially in restoration and conservation guidelines.

The owners proved to be very compliant and provided us with the possible data about previous restoration/conservation works on buildings (like dates, what was replaced and with which material ...). The provided data proved to be very valuable in order to fulfil the descriptions sheets (see Elaborate I, Annex 3).

Within the family property are, for example homesteads "Pri Blaževih" and "Pri Maticovih" in Gorenje pri Divači, "Kavalinova spahnjenca" in Povir and the homestead "Pri Pilbakovih" in Štanjel.

In the property and management of Roman Catholic Church in Slovenia are the churches with the adjoining territory and wayside chapels. The prominent examples are parish church of St. Eliah in Kopriva, Assumption church in Gura, the Assumption church in Šmarje pri Sežani or St. Peter parish church in Povir.

"Škrateljnova" homestead in Divača is of the public property, as well as Jakopin barn in Škocjan, which is protected as the national monument (EŠD 9120) and is legally owned by The Škocjan Caves.

The Cultural Protection Act deals also with the rights and duties of owners of cultural properties. Owners must protect and maintain their heritage at their own expense, but have a right to free explanation, advice and instructions from the appropriate public service and can gain some public funds for the maintenance or the interventions on the building.

Since the second half of the former century it has become clear that it is almost necessary and inevitable to add a secondary purpose to the traditional architecture. In present-time some representative buildings are for rent also for cultural, touristic or museum means. Only by this "added value" can be created the pre-conditions for the building maintenance, as well as the pre-conditions for the sustainable development of rural areas. The prominent case is the homestead "Pr' Betanci" in Betanja at Škocjan, which is still privately owned, the owner lives in it, but it serves also as the tourist farmstead.



#### 4. Maintenance and restoration of traditional architecture

Today, many villages, *hiške* and hamlets in the hinterland of eastern Adriatic coast are abandoned and are left to constant decay. The reasons are generally a combination of economic migration, poor infrastructure, remoteness and lack of transport connections and a mismatch of traditional architecture with demands of the modern lifestyle.

A great part of the stone roofs-buildings that we encounter nowadays has been abandoned and consequently poorly preserved. A lot of them have only recently been restored using original materials and applying traditional techniques in order to preserve traditional features, as maintaining of the traditional architecture is quite expensive and complex and requires the cooperation of professionals, skilled experts, competent institutions and – last but not least – of building owners.

In the middle of the former century the inhabitants of Kras and the building owners did not put much care in using traditional features and construction techniques during the restoration and enlargement of houses. Stone roofs were usually replaced with modern, lighter tiled roofs, which also enable adaptations of the residential space directly under the roof.

Only a small number of buildings have preserved the original wooden structure of the roofing on which the stone slates are horizontally laid. Very often buildings do not have stone roofing in the residential space anymore, but have preserved the roof of the detached or added kitchen or *spahnjenca*, made of platy limestone. The roof of the *spahnjenca*, often remains as a relict; due to its small dimensions it is easily to maintain.

Human factor represents a major threat to the survival of the built heritage. In particular, the process of decaying is born through negligence and ignorance of the traditional materials and techniques. A typical problematic issue in the restoration of that type of architecture is caused by the inadequate structural improvements regarding dry stone walls.



Figure 3

Kazlje 10, a modern example of integration of the old building with the roof of platy limestone with a newly built extension (photo Mitja Guštin, 2014).

Injection of the inappropriate material (concrete) that is injected in structural gaps between limestone blocks has caused several problems, such as calcification of stone that eventually leads to the deterioration of stone elements. Besides, once concrete is chemically bonded with stone, it can be only removed physically, and it can cause cracks, as it is stiffer and more brittle material than lime. However, use of concrete mortar for interior walls, as well as for surrounding dry stone walls, is strictly inadvisable. In the cases when the use of interior plaster is inevitable, it is recommended to use the lime mortar.

Another result of a widespread misuse of concrete in the renovation of traditional houses is for the flooring, which is often made of thin concrete layers. Traditionally these floors joists were made of wooden beams, what is a relatively cheap and durable solution, which allowed the structure “to breathe”.

As mentioned in the former chapter, the legal status of the protection (in comparison to more representative architecture) is only to a lesser extent assigned to the rural, vernacular architecture. Therefore the renovation is officially not regulated through the acts, but depends totally on the owners, who are free to choose the material and the method of renovation. They often choose the cheaper material or improperly modernize the vernacular building regarding the modern life needs.

The tradition of roof-covering with platy limestone has been gradually decreasing ever since the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and culminated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In other words as soon as ceramic roof tiles have become widely available due to its cheapness. Only lower layers (usually the lower two or three rows) were covered with stone tiles. This bad practice of renovation is visible both in urban and rural areas.

In the architectural heritage the participants in the process of projecting (responsible authority/owner, chief conservator, investor) have to put a lot of effort in finding the appropriate integral solution for the renovation of the old deteriorated building. Change or inadequate renovation of the roof covering (like replacement of the stone slates with ceramic tiles) means not only the change of roof covering, frequent are also procedures on the supporting construction – roofing. So project work moves from so-called regular building maintenance to the project for obtaining a construction permit.

On almost all (badly restored, abandoned or decaying) buildings in the rural parts of Kras, slates of platy limestone were replaced with asbestos slates, even iron or lime slates, which were mounted on the original wooden construction. The main problem in that type of the reconstruction is the lack of skilled professionals, who are trained to work with traditional materials and traditional construction techniques. The second issue is procurement of the material, particularly of the bonding materials such as lime mortar. Since almost all platy limestone material is found in the vicinity of the platy limestone-buildings, small amounts of the same material could be excavated in the direct proximity for the purpose of the renovation of deteriorated roofs. In many cases, slates of platy limestone are stored quite close and can be reused during the renovation process.



In several houses the roof was pulled down and consequently rebuilt (for example: homestead "Pri Maticovih" in Gorenje pri Divači). In some cases the stone roof has been reconstructed on an original wooden structure, usually by applying concrete roofing and stone slates, horizontally connected to one another as for example house in Gabrovica pri Črnem Kalu 40. In some cases (like Ražman house, Gračišče), a bituminous layer was lathed between wooden roofing and *skrila/škrile/škrle*, a technique, that has led to structural problems.

In order to preserve the original structure and the original appearance of the vernacular architecture, for successful conservation work the traditional skills in stone masonry are crucial. Yet, there have only been few properly educated professionals with practical knowledge about traditional processing of stone and wooden elements and these masters as well as their apprentices have proved to be very expensive to hire. One of the most distinguished masters is Gabrijel Jeram from Štorje. On the other hand, the skill of manually extracting platy limestone has almost been forgotten; for example, despite the long tradition of the stone processing on Kras there are only few people today who still practice this tradition.

Maintaining the traditional architecture is quite expensive and complex, because it requires the cooperation of professionals, skilled experts, competent institutions and – last but not least – of building owners. It has become almost necessary to adaptively re-use the traditional buildings. Traditional houses offer the possibility and challenge for architects in conservation, especially where buildings are privately owned, as they can be harmoniously adapted for modern living standards while keeping the qualities of the historic structure, as shows the example of good practice in the farmstead "Pr' Maticovih" in Gorenje pri Divači.

## 5. Conclusions

During the process of the maintenance and the renovation of stone houses as well as stone roofing in the city centres that have been recognised as an important urbanistic historic monument (for example Štanjel) the role of the local population, which understands the need for the preservation of the traditional looks of the architecture, is of special importance. It is fundamental that they are able to understand and recognize the need for the preservation of the traditional architecture and to maintain its authentic look as much as possible.

The responsible official services (state and municipal) have repeatedly put efforts in the preservation of at least an exterior of the architecture. However, the conservation guidelines are often powerless due to the cheaper building material, industrial construction works, and rigidity of the new generations of the owners or the building-users and are often "the victim" of the collision between the past and modern life.



Figure 4

Štanjel, maintenance of an old traditional house (left), and reconstruction of a new building for touristic purposes (photo Mitja Guštin 2013).

Rural stone architecture is through time much more subjected to the constant changes. Certain areas of the cultural landscape have been abandoned due to the remoteness, poor infrastructure and poor economical state. It is not very uncommon that in certain villages only sacral buildings have remained more or less well-preserved. Homesteads and auxiliary buildings are, as soon as the roofing collapses, unceasingly decaying; the drywalls by the paths and by the pieces of land are overgrown with spines and bush.

The population still remaining in the countryside aims to the building standards of the developed urbanized centres. Too often they construct new building structures and use their old homesteads as the auxiliary buildings; in the case if they decide to live in them, they rearrange the traditional buildings according to their life needs. The modernization of the living space is

often realized at the expense of the traditional building and without any professional supervision.

However, the city inhabitants have to a great extent contributed to the preservation of the traditional architecture in the rural areas as well as in the Adriatic islands, as they often decide to spend their holiday in the countryside and prefer to stay in a traditional Mediterranean house and have therefore put effort in the renovation of singular buildings for their own needs. Some of them overtook also the demanding task like the construction of the roofing that could endure the heavy stone slates (cf. Figure 5), as ever since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the stone slates were usually replaced with much lighter ceramic tiles.



Figure 5  
Gorenje pri Divači, “Pri Maticovih”,  
an example of a recent reconstruction for residential purposes (photo Mitja Guštin 2013).

Modern conservational approach has to encompass the stone architecture heritage as the integral whole, as the morphology of geological forms, vegetation as well as the work of human hands that have – establishing their living space – fundamentally influenced the cultural landscape. It is the karstic limestone mountain chain that has “caused” the specific look of the cultural landscape, which is dotted with stone houses, homesteads, *hiške* and village churches with belfries.

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