NEWSLETTER OF THE PROJECT

'Recapitalization of MerlinCV – to provide innovative experiences of natural and cultural heritage in a cross-border area'

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THE INTRODUCTORY AND SECOND MEETING OF THE RecapMCV PROJECT PARTNERS

On 20 September 2023, the introductory meeting of the RecapMCV capitalisation project took place at the Science and Research Centre Koper (ZRS Koper) Centre for Humanities. The project consortium consisting of ZRS Koper (the lead partner), the Municipality of Tolmin, the Venetian Cluster, srl, and INFORMREST will upgrade and perform a targeted promotion of the key digital products and their effects, developed in the framework of the MerlinCV strategic project. In doing so, special attention will be paid to multisensory forms of presentation of the heritage of castles and mansions in the cross-border area. The purpose of the meeting was to inform the project partners of the implementation of the project, i.e., the detailed content plan and the timeline of the project for each individual activity, and of the communication activities, with an emphasis on the overall graphic image and other requirements of the new Interreg programming period. Refining the tasks and getting acquainted with the know-how of this project partnership facilitates networking between individual project partners when it comes to the development of concrete project results in the framework of the preparation of cross-border strategies and action plans for an innovative digitisation of cultural heritage, as well as the organisation of cross-border events and cross-border public functions intended to promote digitised solutions in the field of heritage for the general public, including the development of a mobile immersive room.

During the next coordination meeting, which took place online on 6 December 2023, the entire project consortium was informed about the introductory activities that are currently already in progress or that have already been implemented and that will enable further work to continue, such as the communication plan and the study visit of the Municipality of Tolmin project partner to Salzano, where the Venetian Cluster has

prepared a presentation of an example of an immersive room. We discussed project activities in which certain details have not yet been finalised or where new ideas have opened up on how to upgrade and implement something in a more efficient manner, and propose even more innovative solutions.

STUDY VISIT TO THE IMMERSIVE HALL IN THE FORMER SPINNING MILL IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF SALZANO

On 22 November 2023, a study visit to the immersive hall in the former spinning mill in the Municipality of Salzano took place in the general context of the RecapMCV project, representing the first step in developing the guidelines and planning the implementation of immersive exhibition environments at Tolmin Castle.

It is an innovative set-up of a "magical place" where the poetic and evocative images of virtual butterflies, designed by the architect Lorenzo Greppi from Fiesolo, accompany the visitor in experiencing new content related to silk, its production and the protagonists who devised the ancient symbolic factory in Salzano. The spinning mill provides content to a dense network of collaborations brimming with meaning and value. The content was shared with the Romanin-Jacur family and the Jewish Museum Padua (Museo Padova Ebraica), the institution Stazione Bacologica Sperimentale in Padua, the Serinnovation network, the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the ConfCommercio association in Mirano, which, together with the Municipality of Salzano, has set up a commercial district referring specifically to the Silk Road.

The visit started at 10 a.m., when Maurizio Malè, representative of the Venetian Cluster, the Venetian project partner, gave a warm welcome to all the representatives of the institutions present: Carlotta Campanini (Venetian Cluster), Matej Kavčič (Tolmin Municipality), Tadej Koren and Miha Mlinar (Tolmin Museum) and Mateja Leban (Soča

Valley Tourism Board). The event started by Mr Malè highlighting the rich history of the spinning mill building in the Municipality of Salzano. He stressed the fundamental importance of this visit for the RecapMCV project and described its role in the general context and its significance as the first step towards the development of guidelines for future immersive exhibitions at Tolmin Castle.

The delegation had a tour of the spinning mill museum and the immersive hall, examining the technological innovations designed and introduced as part of the Merlin CV project. The representatives of the Municipality of Tolmin were impressed by the immersive communication techniques and were pleased to document the technological solutions with photos and videos.

Dr Kavčič from the Municipality of Tolmin presented the communication needs of Tolmin Castle and its facilities suitable for immersive experience. The discussion addressed the issues related to the transfer of technological innovations presented during the visit to Tolmin Castle and the planning of future content. The next meeting has been scheduled for early 2024 to explore Tolmin Castle and the areas to be used for the immersive experience. The study visit ended at 11.45 a.m.

Maurizio Malè at the entrance to the immersive hall of the Museo della Filanda in the Municipality of Salzano, created as part of the European project MerlinCV.

Entrance to the immersive hall of the Museo della Filanda in the Municipality of Salzano, created as part of the European project MerlinCV.
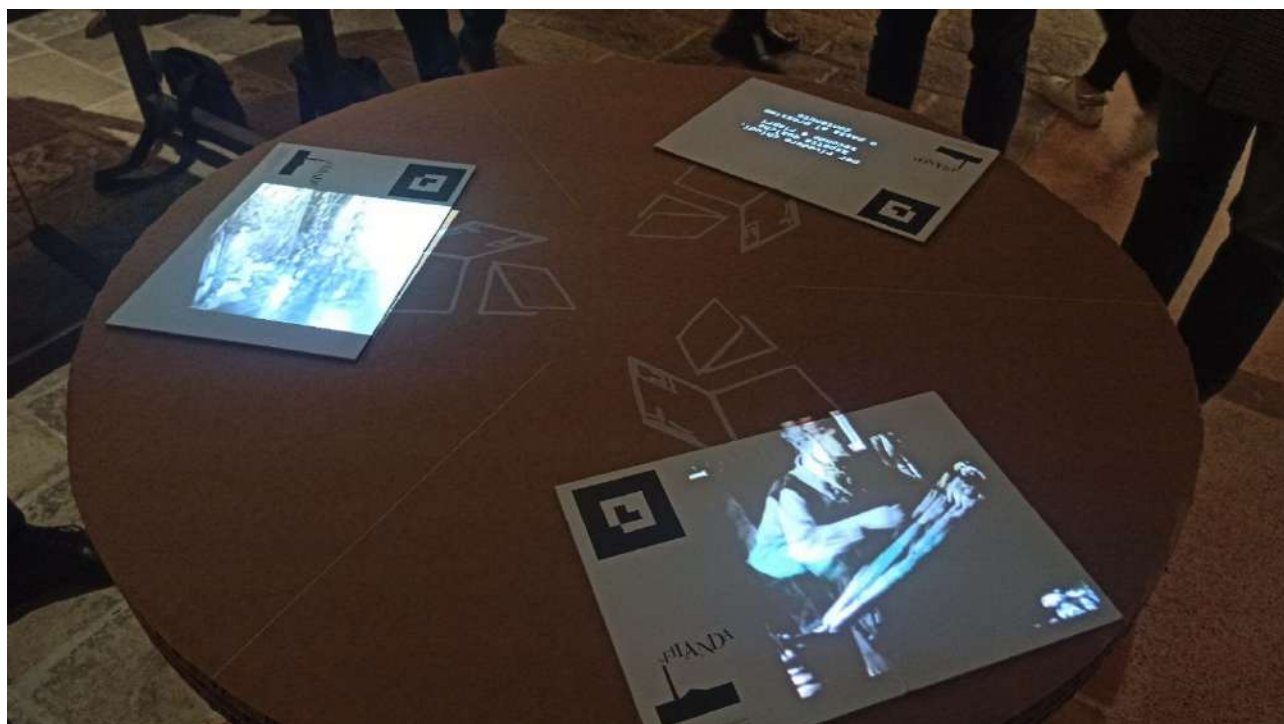
The immersive hall at the Museo della Filanda in the Municipality of Salzano.

The exchange of opinions between project partners on the study visit.

EXPERIENCE WITH DIGITAL PRESENTATION OF HERITAGE IN SLOVENIA

In Slovenian tourism, digitisation of cultural heritage, as well as the strategies for the development of Slovenian tourism which bring fresh ideas into the presentation of the tourist offer and cultural heritage through the latest technologies, became an important topic of discussion of tourist offer providers over time. Strengthening the immersiveness and interactivity of the visitor experience has become more of a standard than an exception in tourism. The latest edition of the Days of Slovenian Tourism was also largely devoted to those topics. Tourism 4.0, probably the largest current project and platform in Slovenia, brings together over 190 partners and actively involves the local community in the development and strategy. The entire platform is based on the key points of sustainable tourism pursuant to the Industry 4.0 strategy which focuses on transforming the current tourism industry into a value economy through innovation, knowledge, and technology. The most important effects of the project are 3D digital captures of cultural heritage units which are available at the website of the Digital Innovation of Cultural Heritage portal. For the town of Koper, for example, 3D models and images of the Praetorian palace, the Church of St Francis of Assisi and the Tavern were created.

Virtual guides are probably the most widespread method of use of the integration of modern technologies into the tourist presentation of cultural heritage. The Nexto Guide application, for example, allows the user to select a location and then provides them with interactive tasks and quizzes that the user must solve by observing their surroundings, as well as with simulated discussions between historically famous people from a certain location (e.g. a discussion between the young Giuseppe Tartini and his father at the location of the Tartini monument in Piran). On a related platform, the Immersum application was also developed, enabling a virtual guided tour of the history of ancient Emona, in the framework of which the user can put themselves in the shoes

of a Roman slave. In cooperation with the company Arctur, the Regional Museum Goriški muzej similarly developed MALT, an augmented reality application. The application offers a new way of exploring the sights of Nova Gorica at 17 locations once the visitors approach them at a distance of 10 metres or less. The "Most skozi čas" (Most through time) project application proposing digital walks and guided tours of the cultural and natural heritage of the town Most na Soči also works in a similar manner. The application Aviko Štanjel, the digital guide of Štanjel, also functions in a similar vein: Aviko, a child from the prehistoric times, takes you on a walk around the village castle and its surroundings, providing you with information and directing the tour by triggering eight information points located in the user's surroundings.
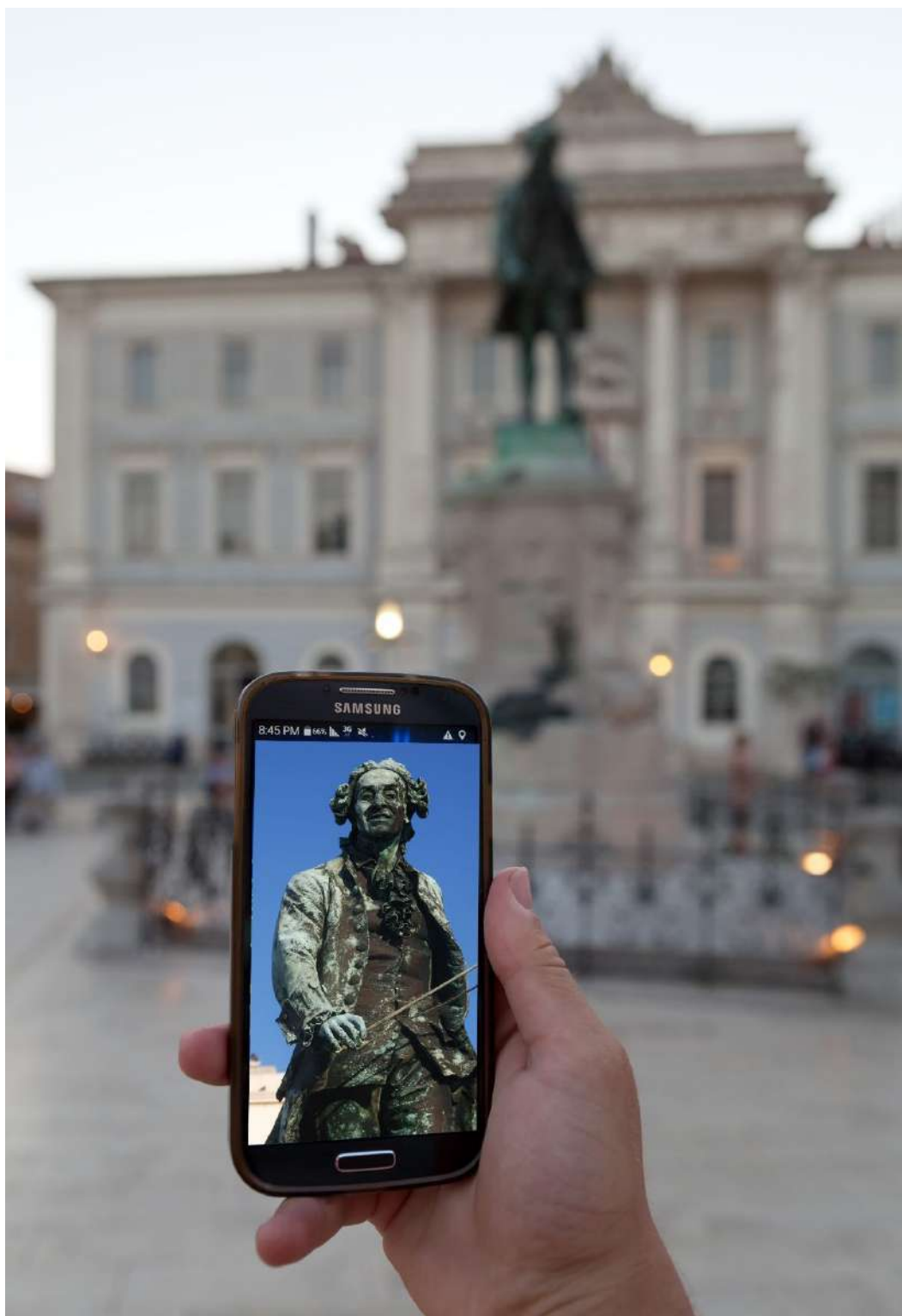
Image taken from: Shutterstock

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Different approaches to the use of the AR experience for tourist purposes have also been developed. The AR Kranj application proposed by the Kranj Tourist Office uses smartphones to conjure various experiences, from the silhouette of France Prešeren who loudly invites the user to visit the museum, to the display of the pillory on the Main Square in Kranj. An interesting example is also the Šentjur AR Tour application, the result of a research project conducted by pupils of the School Center Celje, which currently enables users to use the application next to the panoramic frame at Planina pri Sevnici, with a model of Veronika of Desenice and Frederick II, Count of Celje. A much better-known example of the use of AR technology is the Žiče Charterhouse, the application for which, developed by the company CtrlArt, proposes a tour of the facilities that can no longer be found on the site, or a reconstruction of existing ruins. Users can meet with monks and follow the legend about the formation of the monastery; an audio guide is also available. A similar experience is proposed by the Old Vine House in Maribor which helps the user to assume the role of the Old Vine and experience 450 years of the history of the area surrounding the oldest vine in the world using smart glasses. The Friderik VR experience, available at the Hotel Thermana Park Laško and at the Celje Castle, is much more functionally complete. The experience was created by the "Storytellers from Laško" team that presented their idea during the hackathon of the Slovenian Tourist Board and was also a part of the ABC accelerator in Ljubljana as the winning team. The user, who assumes the role of Frederick, must escape from the tower and find Veronika of Desenice. The application which is, in fact, more like a full-fledged VR game, received extremely high ratings and an enviable list of awards. Another project worth mentioning is the 4th DRITL, a virtual mining museum which also offers an interactive escape game in a VR environment with a task of saving injured miners from the "Black Hole" (Črna luknja), the deepest part of the Trbovlje mine.

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Numerous virtual tours have been created during the pandemic, and are offered in various forms. One of the examples is the COME-IN! project proposed by the Sergej Mašera Maritime Museum which offers its visitors the experience of a virtual tour of Tona's House and the Museum of Salt Making using 3D glasses, as well as the possibility of experiencing a voyage through the Gulf of Piran aboard the Adria, an Istrian cannon. It would be remiss not to mention one of the largest repositories of virtualisation of natural and cultural heritage spaces: the private project "Moja Slovenija" (My Slovenia), launched in 1993, which is based on interactive 360° spatial images. The volume of digitised material is extraordinary, from natural locations and urban tours to themed walks, and is primarily intended to be used by people with mobility issues and for distance learning purposes.

Image taken from: Shutterstock

We can conclude that the offer on the market will become much more visible over time, since most of the examples presented in this document are rather underrepresented or poorly advertised in practice, and tourists generally obtain information about any available VR and AR experiences at the location itself. This is most likely the crucial deficiency of the offer of these products in Slovenia, the reason for which can be attributed to the fact that those strategies and approaches in tourism are relatively

new. With additional funding for themed projects and the development of the existing projects, it is expected that the strategic integration of the content in question, as well as the presence of such technologies among the local population, will grow considerably, which will further contribute to the visibility and better use of those technologies.

Author: Štefan Hadalin

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN DIGITISING HERITAGE - THE WALK OF PEACE PROJECT

Over the years, Informest has been involved in several projects, which have led to the design and implementation of innovative solutions for the promotion and digitisation of local cultural heritage with the aim of making it accessible to various target audiences. One such example is undoubtedly the Walk of Peace project, funded by the Interreg Italy-Slovenia Programme, regarding which Informest provided technical assistance to the project partner ERPAC FVG (Regional Institute for the Cultural Heritage of Autonomous Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia).

The Walk of Peace project, which focuses on the conservation and promotion of historical heritage related to the First World War in the Italian-Slovenian cross-border area with a view to developing sustainable cultural tourism, showcases interesting examples of the digital use of the territory and its heritage, which can be transposed to other environments and destinations. Practical examples include

-        WALK OF PEACE - KOBARID DURING WW1 IN AR

The app allows visitors to explore the historic town of Kobarid and discover the places involved in the First World War, enriching their experience with the use of augmented reality technology. By downloading the app, you will be able to view various historical

photographs, discover hidden details of buildings and objects, listen to soldiers' stories, see the Walk of Peace and its monuments, as well as the surrounding area.

- RUSSIAN CHAPEL AR

The app, developed in collaboration with Escapebox d.o.o., allows visitors to relive the past through augmented reality and to discover the history of this still little-known place using only their mobile phone.

- SAN MICHELE VR

The Multimedia Museum of Mount San Michele features a digital and innovative offer comprising virtual reality (VR), interactive 2D and 3D maps and the San Michele AR app, which gives the visitor a 360-degree experience and allows them to listen to the stories of war correspondents, see the scenes of life in the trenches, virtually visit the Cima 3 Gallery and the cave named after general Lukačič, as well as discover the WWI attractions of Friuli Venezia Giulia, monuments, trails and bases in the open-air Museum of Mount San Michele.

- 3D MODELS

The project outputs included 3D models of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Javorca, the military cemetery in Log pod Mangartom and the Russian Chapel on Vršič: data acquisition with non-contact measurement devices, cameras and 3D scanners allows for high-quality documentation of the surfaces of objects, buildings and terrain.

- WALK OF PEACE MAP

The website also enables visitors to consult an interactive map showing various points of interest related to the First World War heritage, such as classical and outdoor museums, military cemeteries, churches, monuments and memorials, as well as trails and natural or cultural heritage sites. This is an interesting tool mainly because of its comprehensibility, allowing the user to visualise the location of various points of

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interest on the map and capture the main information about them, so as to better organise their visit. The Walk of Peace Map: https://www.thewalkofpeace.com/map/

The use of these technologies allows the visitor experience to be enriched with detail, increasing engagement and thus attracting the attention of younger target audiences. By digitising the offer, it is possible to reach people who cannot visit the place in person but would still like to learn more about the subject.

The experience gained by Informest during the most recent programming period in the framework of the Walk of Peace cross-border project and other cross-border and transnational projects that have contributed to the visibility of Friuli Venezia Giulia, will be made available to the RecapMCV project in order to offer, at the European level, suitable solutions for the development of innovative and sustainable thematic tourism through the digitisation of heritage and its promotion to new target groups (vulnerable groups, people with disabilities, creative and cultural industries, and social entrepreneurship).
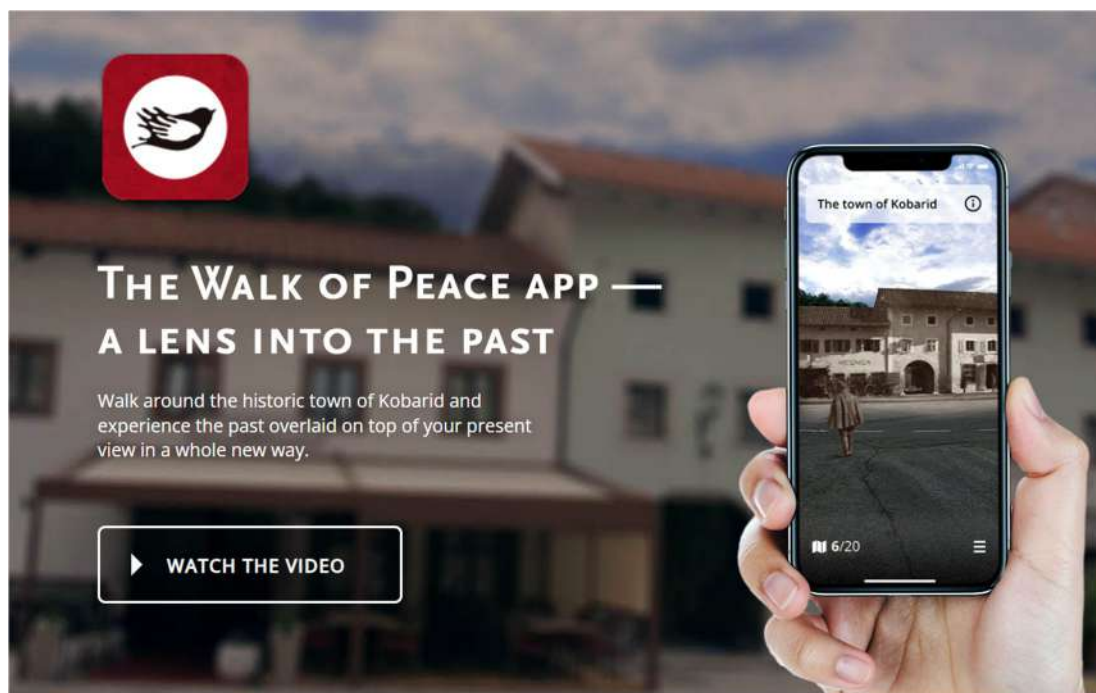

Image taken from: Walk of Peace - Kobarid during WW1 in Augmented Reality (potmiru.si)

BASED ON PAST GOOD PRACTICES, THE RECAPMCV PROJECT SETS NEW MILESTONES IN THE FIELD OF THE DIGITAL TREATMENT OF CASTLE HERITAGE

With the RecapMCV project, the Municipality of Tolmin continues the success story of the previous MerlinCV project, in which it participated as one of the partners. Similar to the first project, the current project will also be linked to the castle at Kozlov rob which is currently preserved as a maintained ruin.

The hill above the town is an extremely popular hiking point for locals who mainly use it for recreation purposes, while the innovative interpretation of the heritage of the castle building is an opportunity to improve the potential of this area as a stand-alone tourist point which, together with two buildings in the town (the Coronini Mansion, home of the Tolmin Museum, and the palace of the patriarch, the remains of which are located underground in the part of the town called "Na Doru"), also forms a complete story of three castles in Tolmin.

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Considering that the experts in the field of cultural heritage management does not welcome the construction of new buildings and more extensive renovations at Kozlov rob, and seeing that conservation guidelines are mainly focused on the maintenance of castle ruins, digital technology is proposed as a very convenient method to interpret such heritage. Therefore, one of the activities envisaged by the Municipality of Tolmin as part of the MerlinCV project was an attempt of a 3D reconstruction of the castle on Kozlov rob in its best-preserved image from the 17th century. The Municipality entrusted this task to the company Arctur from Nova Gorica which has extensive experience in the field of developing appropriate solutions for such displays of heritage. In 2021, the "Kozlov rob 3D" online application came to life at www.kozlovrob.si; in addition to basic information about the castle in Slovenian and Italian, the website also reveals attractive 3D displays of the castle that the user can view from various angles, move around the screen with his fingers, and choose a vantage point of their own liking.

The idea for the upgrade to the VR experience matured after the successful implementation of the online application. Once again, Arctur participated in the project as a contractor, successfully developing a platform for an interactive tour of the castle using VR goggles in 2022. The Tolmin Museum was chosen as the location for the placement of this product, since the goal of the Municipality of Tolmin was to enrich the permanent collection of the museum with this novelty.

Photo credits: Kozlov rob 3D (archives of Arctur d.o.o.), VR glasses and VR glasses 2 (archives of the Tolmin Museum)

By participating in the RecapMCV project, new opportunities are opening to continue the story of the digital presentation of the castle heritage in Tolmin. Based on past good practices, the Municipality of Tolmin also wishes to create a so-called immersive room. This is a space in which the visitor is "immersed" in the experience with the help of modern technology. Since the Municipality of Tolmin has successfully obtained funds for the partial renovation of the castle from the Ministry of Culture, this room will be located in the former chapel of St. Martin, part of the castle complex in front of the

northwest tower, which represents a suitable space for this type of experience. The product is expected to be developed by 2025.

Together with the partial physical renovation of the castle, this innovation will significantly improve the user experience of visiting the castle on Kozlov rob "in situ", while using new, attractive ways of digital treatment of heritage and thus undoubtedly contributing to the development of museology in Slovenia and also in the broader Central European context.

Author: Matej Kavčič