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# Preserving and Presenting Heritage through Sustainable Energy Tourism: The Case of Kobarid in Slovenia

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**Abstract:** Energy tourism, which is quite recent despite the fact that the practice of tourists visiting power plants, very often for educational purposes, has a long tradition in Slovenia due to power plants on the Drava River. Particularly, the oldest Fala power plant is an area where the technical field of electric power production and transmission overlaps with tourism. The article that employs the methods of participant observation, interviews with some stakeholders and content analysis focuses on some possibilities of including electric power production and transmission infrastructure into various tourist and educational programmes, including through storytelling, which is a useful tool also when it comes to presenting sustainable and socially responsible project design, considering the needs of all stakeholders involved in the process and, consequently, raising awareness and responsibility towards the environment. Based on a case study of the Kobarid substation, which is a modern sustainably designed power facility built in a Natura 2000 protected area, this article focuses on the possibilities of creating new energy tourism products by employing storytelling, new media and new technologies.

**Keywords:** tourism; storytelling; Kobarid substation; cooperation; sustainability; new media



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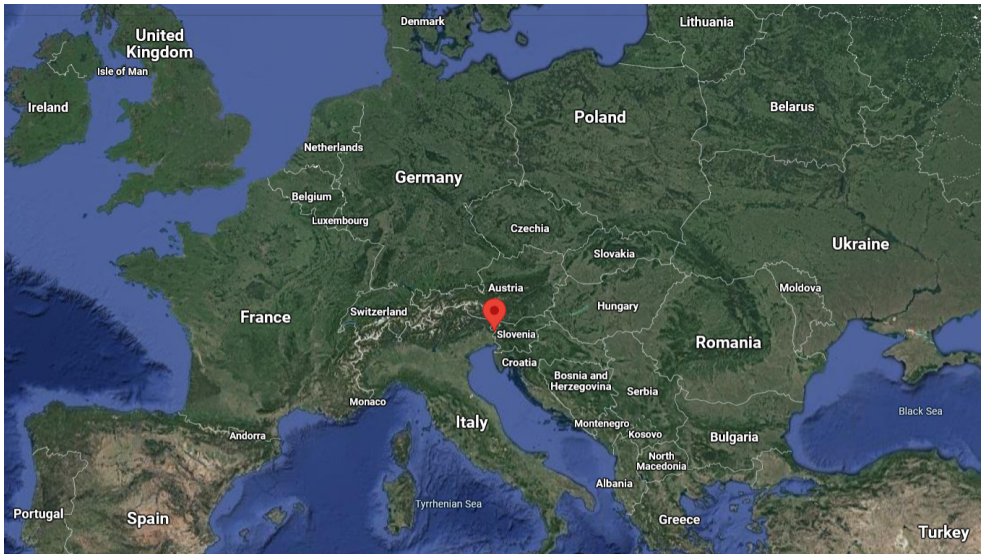
## 1. Introduction

Tourism, as one of the rapidly advancing industries in the world, is largely dependent on effective energy policies [1,2]. However, this is not the only connection between the fields of tourism and electric power. The tourism–energy nexus can be studied from at least three perspectives: (1) Energy as a driver of tourism (basic electrical infrastructure is a prerequisite of tourism), (2) Energy as a constraint of tourism (energy facilities discourage tourists from visiting a destination) and (3) Energy as a tourist attraction [3]. This article is focused on the latter, presenting the case of Slovenia in Europe (see the map in Figure 1a, where Kobarid is marked with red), particularly a substation in Kobarid that is a new facility in the protected Slovenian Soča Valley, an area attractive for tourists (see the picture in Figure 1b). Slovenia is a small-scale country in Central Europe, where tourism accounts for around 13% of the GDP. As a destination, it tries to follow new trends, among which Ianioglo and Rissanen [4] mention evolving visitor demand, sustainable tourism growth, enabling technologies and travel mobility as the megatrends that will influence the future of tourism. Digitalisation is another essential trend that changes the tourism industry in many ways [5] and has its own challenges and controversies [6]. As a sub-category of evolving visitor demand, niche tourism could be added—and energy tourism as its sub-type. Energy tourism, which is quite recent despite the fact that the practice of tourists visiting power plants, very often for educational purposes, is not new, is a cross-over area of these fields. The term energy tourism has been conceptualized by Frantál and Urbánková [3], who define it as a new niche of industrial tourism which overlaps also with heritage, cultural, agricultural and adventure tourism, and they explain that due to various perceptions, including negative, of specific materializations and forms of energy, new strategies for branding and communicating to the public have been introduced by interest groups and energy companies. One of these is energy tourism. The authors [3] believe that this type of

special interest tourism which "involves visits by tourists to former, retired, or regenerated sites, as well as to still operational energy sites where some facilities, services, or activities have been provided specifically for tourists' use" ([3], p. 1398) could play a more significant role in the future, "contributing to higher personal product involvement, brand loyalty, or place branding" [3] (p. 1396). One of the most famous examples of energy tourism which is very often related to dark tourism due to its horrific background story is Chernobyl in Ukraine [7]. It is an outstanding example of dark tourism, but at the same time, it is clearly an energy facility that attracted more than 100,000 tourists in 2019 [8] and is thus an attraction.




(**a**)

(**b**)

**Figure 1.** (**a**) Location of Kobarid, Slovenia, in Europe [Google Map]. (**b**) Panoramic view of Kobarid and its surroundings [own source].

Furthermore, energy tourism has the potential to contribute to better knowledge and awareness about the production and consumption of energy and improve tourists' energy literacy [3,9]. The most famous example of this type of attraction in Slovenia is the Nuclear Power Plant Krško that attracts visitors with specific interests not only from Slovenia but also from abroad [10]. With the goals of promotion and education, the powerplant enables them to learn about the nuclear energy production through a guided tour employing

storytelling, simulation and posters. In both place branding and education, storytelling has an essential role. People generally enjoy listening to stories because they prescribe expected behaviour, establish meaning and constitute identity [11]. In tourism, storytelling represents a specific approach to bringing information from the host to the guest, from the tourist guide to the visitor, which is characterised strongly by the tourist experience [12]—also by employing new technology and new media.

## 2. Methods

In this research, focused on the unique area of Kobarid in Slovenia, the goal was to answer the following research questions: (RQ 1) How can electric power production and transmission facilities be included into the tourism offer as a tourist attraction?; (RQ 2) What is the role of a substation and how it can become a tourist attraction in Kobarid?. In addition, in the protected area of the Upper Posočje Valley where tourism is a significant industry (the most developed types are heritage, active and culinary tourism), tourists, especially those who return to the area, expect enriched, diverse, upgraded and different tourist experiences. The research is based on a case study of the Kobarid substation and on literature review on energy tourism. To be able to analyse the role of a substation that is a small electric facility as a potential tourist attraction, in the research, in-depth semi-structured interviews with the leading project designer responsible for the Kobarid substation (the leading project designer was co-working with the locals throughout the whole project) and some other stakeholders were used, along with the method of participant observation (visiting the area in September 2019, March 2020 and August 2021) and content analysis of secondary documents, maps and images [13]. The interviews were focused on embedding the substation into the protected area, considering substations to become tourist attractions and on the challenges of sustainable project design. Interviews that took place face-to-face in the period between September 2019 and November 2021 were transcribed and analysed by using the content analysis method.

## 3. Energy Tourism in Slovenia

In Slovenia, protected areas and natural heritage conservation concerns pose particular challenges for locating electric power facilities in the physical environment. The process must be pursued cautiously, responsibly and in consensus, following cultural heritage charters and documents [14], with thoughts focused on the environment and future development, which can also be linked to sustainable tourism. Numerous cases around the world indicate that electricity facilities, especially power stations, which signify a very pronounced encroachment on the environment, may also serve as an extraordinary opportunity to develop tourism, since the power stations may in themselves represent a tourist attraction and over the decades become part of the precious industrial heritage of a certain area. We may include in energy tourism numerous activities, for instance, touring wind farms and climbing the chimney stacks of thermal power stations, which is closely tied to adventure and sports tourism [15] and also tours of coal mines [16] and tours of farms and horticulture operations where food production is tied to energy [3,17]. There are also plenty of tourists who visit Slovenia and are interested in the hydropower stations along the River Drava—at Fala, the oldest hydropower station on the Drava, a museum has been set up. It is visited by more than 80 groups a year (more than 3000 visitors) that are led by a museum guide [18]. Tourists are also interested in the powerplants on the Sava or Soča, in the prospect of climbing the 360 m chimney stack at the Trbovlje thermal power station and, of course, the nuclear power plant in Krško. Up until the pandemic, the nuclear plant offered visits daily, in which it gave presentations of its operation. This involves strategic communication by nuclear power plants, whereby they seek to influence public opinion [19]. Each year, the nuclear plant has welcomed more than 5000 visitors, with more than half of them being students and secondary and primary school pupils, who visit the plant as part of their educational courses, while various companies, associations and professional groups have chosen the nuclear plant for technically themed excursions [10]. Some energy companies

focus not just on experts and enthusiasts but also in particular on families with children and seniors [3]. Precisely because of the interest shown, the establishing of energy facilities as tourism products and the development of museums focused on electric power deserve even greater attention in relation to tourism. An example of a Slovenian electric energy museum is the Fala–Laško Museum of Electric Power Transmission [20], which is one of the rare museums in Europe to showcase such technical heritage. Since its opening in 2004, visitor numbers have consistently grown, despite the absence of intensive promotion, and since 2012, it has recorded more than 2000 visitors annually [21]. Electric energy facilities and objects that are entirely uninteresting for some tourists do in fact represent exceptional attractions for a certain segment of tourists. This is a type of niche tourism that Frantál and Urbánková [3] termed "energy tourism", and it has the potential to draw tourists to what would be less attractive locations, thereby generating additional possibilities for employment, earnings and promotion [22]. In the Spanish Pyrenees, hydropower plants provided new impetus to the development of mountain tourism [23], and in Finland (the case of the Imatrankoski power plant, [24]) and Iceland, electric power facilities, especially hydropower plants and wind farms, which leave a distinct mark on the landscape, are of interest to tourists [25,26]. In Iceland, for instance, even in designing wind farms, they think about the wind turbines as tourist attractions and about including them as features of tourism [26], which is extremely important in terms of sustainability. The value and potential of electric power facilities for tourism has also been recognised in Austria and Germany [27], and partly in Italy and Croatia—looking at Slovenia's neighbours. In Britain, the Drax power station in North Yorkshire was conducting up to six guided tours of the facility a day for tourists before the pandemic [28,29]. Such facilities have great potential, not just for visitor tours, but also for education, something noted by Mažeikienė [30] in the case of nuclear power plants, and which is of course an established practice in Slovenia, too, where by prior arrangement you can tour numerous power stations and learn about their operation and importance. Raising awareness about responsible electricity consumption is also a salient issue in terms of climate change and the target of the 'below 2 degrees Celsius' scenario, which is aligned with the strategic aims of the Paris Agreement and the sustainability goals of the UN (the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs 7, 8, 11, 13)) [31]. Of course, in the case of energy tourism, it involves for the most part visitors and tourists with special interests and naturally school children and pensioners. Equally, it should be noted with this type of tourism that some sections of the public and tourists will always oppose the construction of electricity infrastructure and the consequent encroachments on the physical environment, but in this regard, there is an interesting case precisely in Germany, where a study has shown that following initial opposition to environmental encroachments with electricity infrastructure, as much as 45% of German tourists affirmed that they realise there is electricity infrastructure at their destination, but only 4% said that this infrastructure bothered them [27].

Alongside power stations, transformer substations are also of interest to tourists. A positive case in Slovenia is the previously mentioned Fala–Laško Museum of Electric Power Transmission, where the first water-powered installation for generating electricity in Slovenia was constructed in 1885 (according to oral tradition, it was even earlier in 1881). The first electric light bulb in the Laško area and in Lower Styria was therefore lit up six years after Edison's first creation of the light bulb. Electrification was possible through the construction of large generation facilities and the transmission of electric power over great distances, which came about in 1924, when the company Fala d. d. constructed a 77 km long, 80 kV transmission line from the Fala power station to the 80/35 kV transformer substation in Laško and then a 35 kV line from Laško substation to the Trbovlje thermal power station. In Slovenia and what was then Yugoslavia, this was the first long-distance transmission line. The first large-scale parallel operation was established, and the first maintenance shop was set up at the Laško substation. This marked the start of electricity transmission development in Slovenia [32].

Although this involves an entirely different type of electric power facility, the substations can also be included among museums and, for instance, among thematic tourist trails, and these can be furnished with informative digital content and information panels so that, through attractive content and stories, visitors and tourists can learn about their role and importance. The development of various thematic trails, which are offered to visitors and tourists with in-person guides or, more frequently, as independent tours using special applications, digital maps and brochures, is a popular tourist trend [33], which is in part because it requires no additional infrastructure and can be tied to all manner of content and existing products and services. In this way, such facilities are no longer just installations serving their original purpose, and for many people, an aesthetic blight on the landscape, but are their own kind of tourist attraction, helping to educate people about the importance of electricity infrastructure, technical heritage, the importance of engineering know-how for everyday life and progress. They also serve to raise awareness about sustainable development, environmental responsibility and linking the past with the future. All this can be achieved through collaboration with interested stakeholders in tourism and by designing (digital) content based primarily on stories, especially in case of Kobarid that has very rich natural and cultural heritage.

## 4. Storytelling in Energy Tourism

Stories have many roles, one of them being to explain and make some things or phenomena, such as research conclusions, climate change, technical issues, etc., possible to understand [34]. Since it was established that storytelling creates emotional connections between a destination and its target groups [33,35], products and destinations are branded through stories. Moreover, stories have the potential to solve complex challenges and facilitate collaboration [36]. By employing new technology and new media, stories—which are often characterized by high informational density [37]—may contribute successfully to the distinctiveness of a tourism product or a tourism destination. Digital technologies offer many possibilities for innovation in storytelling, including developing online museums of stories by employing various narrative techniques and travel writing [38]. This is significant because businesses and employees reliant on selling on the ground product or on receiving income from visitors depend on tourists' engagement with the stories behind the products [39], and when it comes to applying storytelling in Tourism, it needs to be emphasised that "the storytelling concept requires communication between different stakeholders: Tourism policy makers, destination organisations and service providers. It includes tourism organisations, public administration at local and regional levels, private partners, different types of service providers (hotels, restaurants, museums, shops etc.) and storytellers (individuals)" [12] (p. 93). Successful storytelling, which can be a valuable tool for policymakers [36], includes experts from many fields. The storytelling model proposed by Mossberger et al. [12,40] represents the multi-way communication process of storytelling at a destination (Figure 2).

Yet, although science is aware of the necessary cooperation between the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences if changes such as energy efficiency and climate change are to be addressed successfully [41,42], in practice, there is still very little advice on how to complement narratives collected through qualitative research with technical knowledge from engineering [43]. One of the goals of this article is to show—with the case of the Kobarid substation—how technical knowledge may be used through storytelling in tourism and how interdisciplinary knowledge is employed for tourism purposes. As suggested by Gordon et al. [43], video storytelling could also be employed. In the videos and short video clips available online or via apps, experts involved in the project, in our case the project of the Kobarid substation, would explain the role of such infrastructure and the process of designing and building the facility, emphasizing the protection of nature and the protection of the autochthonous fish, marble trout (Salmo trutta marmoratus) [44]. This process of project design is explained later on in the article. Some authors [45] point out negative aspects of putting technology into unique tourism areas because of the possible

negative effects on the landscape and wildlife, but environmental studies and the needs of the local community were in favour of the substation in Kobarid [46]. Another aspect that needs to be considered in the case of Kobarid is smart tourism destinations, where essential elements of smartness are infrastructure, human capital and information [47]. Thus, further developing tourist experiences should include creating intelligent platforms, applications [48] and ethnopôles—digital platforms presenting ethno-knowledge [49]. Of course, developing a smart storytelling model that involves all necessary stakeholders and data requires a careful study and planning but improves the tourist experience [48,50].

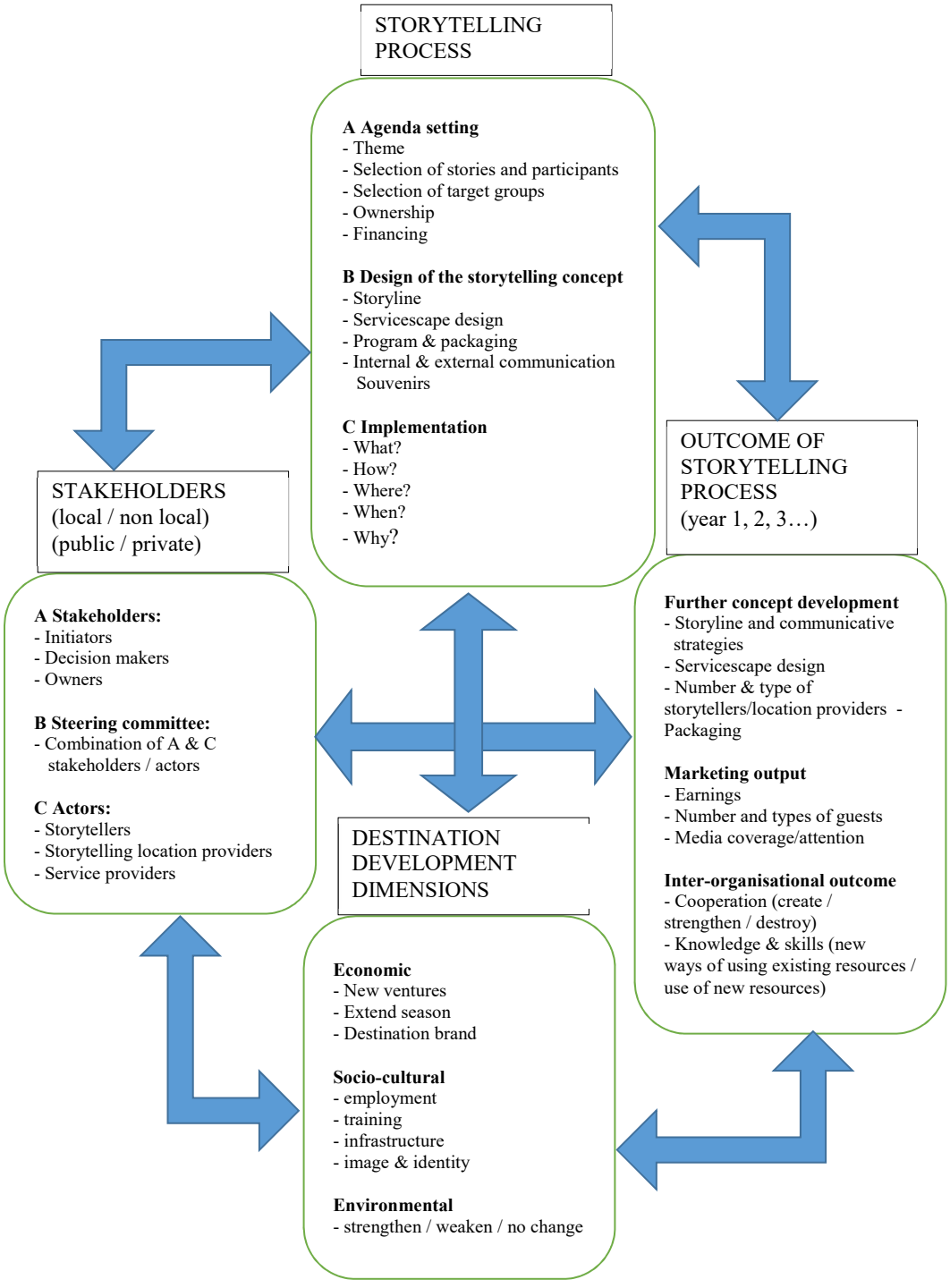



**Figure 2.** Mossberg's storytelling model.

## 5. Case Study: Kobarid Substation

The fact is that electricity consumption in Slovenia is growing, in part due to the needs of the tourism sector, and consequently, there is a need to expand and upgrade the electric energy infrastructure. In line with the valid legislation, every electric power facility such as a transformer substation with a voltage of 110 kV falls within the group of complex facilities, where the complexity in designing such facilities is a factor from siting them to their start-up. The information and data on the complex process of project design were gathered through seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with the leading project designer responsible for the Kobarid substation [46,51–56]. Face-to-face interviews focused on embedding the substation into the protected area, on project design and on considering the substation to become a tourist attraction took place in the period between September 2019 and November 2021.

Kobarid is a small town and municipality with around 4500 inhabitants [57]. It borders Italy and is surrounded by high mountain peaks of the Julian Alps. The landscape, green nature and rich cultural heritage, especially heritage from the First World War, attract tourists from everywhere. One of the main reasons for the construction of a new substation in Kobarid was tourism with its growing needs. The development of tourism and the economy in the Upper Posočje, Idrija and Cerkno regions brought with it greater needs, and this pointed to the urgent necessity to construct a new 110/35/20 kV transformer substation at Kobarid—with the goal to improve the quality of life of the locals and to enable further development of tourism, also with an objection that the facility could be further developed into an attraction (special emphasis was on the appearance of the substation and on the architecture) [53,54]. The construction took place from December 2017, when the construction permit was issued, to September 2020, when the technical inspection was performed on the facility.

Further on in the article, some details of sustainable design and construction are presented because they are vital for the understanding of sustainable design that works in cooperation with the local community. These data would be a part of the story presenting the construction of the Kobarid substation (and the construction of hydro-power plants on the Soča (Isonzo) River) for tourists interested in electrical facilities and in energy tourism. The new 110/35/20 kV substation at Kobarid, which was designed by the engineering team of IBE d. d., has been in operation since September 2020. Since it ensures a reliable supply of electric power, it constitutes a vital acquisition for the further economic development of the Posočje area, where manufacturing and tourism are the mainstays. It enables the further development of existing consumers and the connection of new ones, while end-use losses in the grid will be reduced, since the new Kobarid substation replaces the old supply point for the distribution network on the medium-voltage level. The new acquisition serves to increase capacities in the distribution network and improve the continuity of supply, which in turn serves to facilitate the overall development of the Upper Posočje region. This is the first example of the construction of a substation in Slovenia in which the company SODO d.o.o. ensured the efficiency of management and implementation of the project by means of a single tender and one joint contract for all construction works, supply and assembly of equipment and all functional testing. It is the largest and most complex investment by SODO d.o.o. in recent years, valued at EUR 4.5 million, which, despite its complexity, was carried out within the set time frames. The overall project involved SODO d.o.o., Elektro Primorska d.d. and the company IBE d.d. as project designer, plus the participation of work contractor Kolektor Igin [52,53].

## 6. Progress and Challenges of the Kobarid Substation Project

For a better understanding of the significance of the Kobarid substation and the challenges that the substation designers faced, some details of the project progress are presented. The project assignment required at the existing location the installation of a 110 kV junction with single H-contact collectors, two transmission lines and two transformer fields with linear separation, a 35 kV junction with single collectors in a minimum size

of 10 cells, a 20 kV junction with single collectors comprising three sectors with linear separation in a minimum size of 24 cells, space for two 110/20 kV power transformers of 20 MVA minimum power, space for two inductors and auxiliary spaces for secondary equipment, own consumption and other technological equipment [46,51].

This was followed by the collection of basic information about the possible micro-location for the construction of the new Kobarid transformer substation. An inspection was performed of the location of the existing Kobarid substation (Figure 3), and parallel to this, data on permissible developments at the envisaged location were obtained at the competent administrative unit in Kobarid [51].

After the input data on the existing location was gathered, it was determined that the existing Kobarid substation lies in [46,51,52]:

- A special Natura 2000 conservation area (In Slovenia, there are 355 Natura 2000 zones covering over 37% of the country's territory);
- An impact zone for the protected area of the Soča natural monument, as specified in the Ordinance declaring cultural and historical monuments and natural features in the area of the municipality of Tolmin;
- The ecologically important area of the Soča, as set out in the Decree on ecologically important areas;
- An archaeological site;
- On the margins of the littoral land of the River Soča;
- In a protected area designated through the Alpine Convention treaty, which has the purpose of sustainable development and protection of the Alps as a single spatial unit;
- The existing access road past the cemetery has inclines and bends that are not suitable for heavy lorries, which are essential for bringing in heavy electric equipment (20 MVA transformers);
- It was also established that there is very little space alongside the existing 35/20 kV Kobarid substation for construction.

**Figure 3.** Location of the existing Kobarid substation [own source].

## 7. Progress and Challenges of the Kobarid Substation Project

Due to the above-stated limitations, project solutions were sought with BIM modelling [52]. In the small available space on a lot measuring 3589 $m^2$, due to the above-mentioned limitations, construction was possible on approximately 1600 $m^2$ of the lot in dimensions of 40 m × 40 m [46].

In formulating the plan for the Kobarid substation, due to the aforementioned limited space of around 40 m × 40 m, of the possible solutions there was a need to select one that would enable the installing of 110 kV, 35 kV and 20 kV junctions, two 110/20 kV 20 MVA transformers with the possibility of increasing power to 40 MVA, two resonance inductors for earthing the neutral point of the transformer, a 110 kV transmission line portal and a connection to the existing HV network [46,51]. The selected design needed to take into account the time component of the project, which envisaged that 110 kV voltage from the Gorica substation could not be run to the Kobarid substation without reconstruction of the Gorica substation, so the new 110/35/20 kV Kobarid substation (Figure 4) had to operate as a 35/20 kV transformer [46,51]. The system also had to enable the transition from 35/20 kV to 110/20 kV transforming without additional construction works. In addition to the stated technological requirements, the design needed to take into account that the facility would be installed in a Natura 2000 zone and a protected area designated under the Alpine Convention [53]. One of the significant goals of the project design was the protection of nature, for instance, that the work areas could only be surfaced with pure, crushed Soča gravel, without exotic plant species and that it was forbidden to encroach within 5 m of the edge of the Soča terrace bank and on nearby tree vegetation [46,52].

**Figure 4.** New Kobarid substation [own source].

For the access road, it was decided to expand the existing cart track and provide a 5 m wide asphalt paved road. Since the existing cart track was owned by the municipality of Kobarid, the procedure of upgrading to an access road could only be carried out by the municipality. The design of the access road is in fact a fine example of best practices, where cooperation between the contracting entity, project designer, the municipality and local interests (specifically the owners of local land parcels) was extremely important. The municipality provided a public unveiling of plans for the owners of parcels along the cart track, along with informative talks on expanding the existing cart track based on the proposed path of the road as laid out by the project designer [46,51]. The municipality forwarded the comments from the owners back to the contracting entity and project designer, which took them into account in the Implementation Project [46,51]. The layout of the access road was arranged so that it did not run through parcels where the owners did

not wish to sell land to the municipality for expansion of the road [46,51]. Good cooperation between the contracting entity, project designer and local community led to a 'win-win' solution, where everyone gave something and gained something. The contracting entity gained time and cost control over the project, and the local community acquired an asphalt access road which enables local people to drive around the cemetery, thereby easing traffic congestion on All Saints' Day. The municipality received co-funding for the construction of the local road [53–56].

The area of available space for construction did not allow for the erection of a free-standing 110 kV junction, and the 110 kV junction could only be installed using gas-insulated switchgears (GIS), and for the same reasons, GIS cells were selected for the 35 kV and 20 kV junctions [46]. All these findings led to a solution in the form of setting up a new structure with spaces for installing a 110 kV junction, 35 kV junction, 20 kV junction and other spaces for ancillary technological equipment, such as own consumption, a command room, a communications room, a compensation room and so forth [46,56]. Alongside the new structure, there was also a need to design in the space available two more foundations for transformers, foundations for an inductor and a transmission line portal for connecting the Kobarid substation to the existing 110 kV Tolmin–Kobarid transmission line. Here, it was also necessary to take into account the transition to 110 kV, which would not require any major construction works. Additionally, taking into account the nature protection requirements and special features of the location, the final solution was arrived at: making three identical transformer foundations adjoining the structure with the 110 kV, 35 kV and 20 kV junctions and ancillary spaces. The third foundation can be used to install resonance inductors, and in the transition to 110 kV, it could be used to install a TR3 110 kV/20 kV, 20 MVA transformer, where there is no need to make additional shut-offs in the first phase of the installed TR1 and TR2 35(21) kV/21 kV, 12 MVA transformers and reconnections of 20 kV consumers [46,51–53]. A special note should be made of the shape of the substation [54], which is designed to merge into the Alpine landscape, with a colour that mimics the emerald of the River Soča. The structure is oriented in the space so that from the nearby most popular tourist viewing spot—the Kobarid Charnel House (Figure 5)—it is the architecturally refined front section that can be seen while the three transformer boxes and foundations are invisible behind it. The substation does not present a disturbance in the landscape, it could, on the contrary, become a tourist attraction, perhaps in terms of an educational room with various simulations educating about the power supply [56].

**Figure 5.** Location of the Kobarid substation in the Natura 2000 [own source].

In planning the final set-up, BIM modelling of the 110/35/20 kV Kobarid substation turned out to be a major advantage, since the 3D model was more easily adapted to the spatial constraints deriving from the requirements of the location [53].

In searching for the right solution for transformer substations, in the background, there is always the fact that they are built for a period of 40 years and more [56], and in their very creation they represent a kind of engineering and cultural heritage. The fact that modern project design is socially responsible and sustainable can be seen in the design of the Kobarid substation, which involved the collaboration of the contracting entity SODO d.o.o. with partners Elektro Primorska d.d., project designer IBE d.d. and contractor Kolektor Igin, and in which all stakeholders took into account the fact that this involved siting a facility within a tourist area with protected natural heritage.

## 8. Conclusions

Placing electric power facilities in tourism products and services represents a new challenge and opportunity for Slovenian and world tourism. Some programmes that are up and running and actively promoted already exist. The most popular such tourist attractions are the hydropower plants and the Krško nuclear power plant. Under normal circumstances, Krško receives more than 5000 visitors a year. Website information is also put out to draw visitors to the museum at the Fala hydropower plant, which operates under the Drava hydropower plants of Maribor, and to the Fala–Laško Museum of Electric Power Transmission. We have noted that other hydroelectric facilities and transformer stations could also be more actively included in the range of tourist products on offer. A nice example of including a transformer station among tourist attractions is provided by the Power Transmission Museum, which incorporates the Laško substation. Further on, the research questions are answered, namely, how can electric power production and transmission facilities be included into the tourism offer as a tourist attraction, what is the role of a substation and how can it become a tourist attraction in Kobarid? The research has confirmed that given its function, location and appearance, the Kobarid substation would be an appealing tourist attraction, although the main function of the facility is to provide better conditions for the development of tourism in the area and better quality of life for the locals. Its main advantages are sustainability, innovative design and location. It should be emphasized here that this kind of attraction is intended both for the general and special-interest segments of tourists, which can be distinguished as follows: (1) very often such attractions are appealing to engineers and electric power experts, (2) the second group includes school pupils and (3) the third group is the general or lay public, which can also include experts and students of other fields, senior citizens and retired persons. It is important here to provide stories or interpretations, applications and digital platforms (with stories, simulations, videos, etc.) for different groups of interested tourists—experts in the field expect technical details, while school children need a different approach, perhaps with games, videos or interactive applications. The main function of the Kobarid substation is not a tourist attraction, but it was designed also with this potential in mind—it could be employed for educational purposes or become a part of the open museum since it is located in the area, very popular with tourists. At the same time, the field of energy tourism is a typical example, showing the importance of interdisciplinary knowledge and cooperation, in part with the aim of creating new attractions, new tourism products and services and in creating stories that are important in terms of informing, entertaining and providing relaxation, education and awareness-raising. Digital technologies enable the creation of digital platforms that function as online museums or digital archives and may be employed in presenting, promoting and preserving heritage. Through a sustainable project of including a substation into the tourist offer, it is possible to raise awareness about the sustainable generation and consumption of electricity, and in cooperation with local tourism stakeholders it is possible to create—for visitors and tourists—thematic trails with digital content and to set up (digital) information panels that raise awareness and educate about the role of electric power facilities. Equally, the existing tourist services and

products of the Posočje region and Slovenia can be enhanced with new tourist products (locals support sustainable tourism initiatives), such as hiking or cycling trails (in Kobarid and its surroundings there are many possibilities for different segments) with information points represented by electricity facilities, which are part of the electric power heritage and at the same time heralds of energy development and social progress. For the purposes of resolving details of the new attraction development, another survey among tourists should be carried out, focusing on creating enhanced experiences. However, in whichever direction the future development of tourism products involving the substation will take its course, the local community should be actively involved. Such thematic trails, if they are appropriately planned, designed and digitally supported, provide an outstanding opportunity to present the range of heritage, industrial, cultural and sports tourism for a certain area or destination. A thematic energy trail in the Posočje region could include the Kobarid substation (perhaps in the form of an open museum), since it is located by the River Soča close to the archaeological site at Kobarid and other nearby attractions, among which the Kobarid Museum is already included in the UNESCO Walk of Peace.

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