

The Path of the Wells

From Nova Gorica to Doberdob



2007-2013
cooperazione territoriale europea
programma per la cooperazione
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Italia-Slovenia
evropsko teritorialno sodelovanje
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Water.

Life without it can not be imagined. There is none. At least not on our planet.





The destiny of large civilisations was and is dependent on sufficient supply with water. People settled next to water or developed ways to collect and transfer it to settlements and fields. By the abundant Nile, simple **canals**, redirecting the river water to the fields, were sufficient, while Arabs in the desert world had to dig **qanats** to water bearing layers. In the areas, rich with groundwater, they dug vertical holes into the soil, then inlaid them with wood or stones and equipped them with simple **shadoof**, poles with counterweights, which simplified the lifting of water. Romans built **aqueducts**, which brought fresh water from distant sources into the cities, while Indians dug deep stepwells to collect rainwater - **bawdi** or **vaav**. At first simple, cylindrical water containers have been changed into true subterranean palaces through the centuries, which were also places of festivities, offerings and prayer. Water was so important for numerous civilisations, that wells often gained the image and role of a temple. Many cultures ascribed divine properties to water and every pantheon held a place of honour for the goddess or god of water. The water ritual of baptism is also the first sacrament in the human life in Christianity and **baptisteries** are independent cultural buildings in many places, constructed near churches themselves. According to researchers, the spirit of water was also worshiped by ancient pagan people of Primorska region.

Water quenches thirst. Water cleans. Body and soul. Ritual washing before prayer is older than the knowledge of the importance of cleanliness. It was known by many old religions, can be found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam... Washing wells

or **sadirvans** are thus in the courtyard of every mosque and constructed with the equal attention to the smallest detail than the religious building itself. **Tsukubai** with flowing water in front of Buddhist temples serves for the washing of hands and rinsing of mouths, as well as the Japanese tea ceremony. Christians believe in the power of holy water, into which they dip their fingertips before crossing themselves when entering churches. Numerous civilisations in various parts of the world have used steam baths; the belief into their healing power connects the Mexican **temazcal**, Roman **caldarium** and Turkish hammam with the Finnish **sauna**.

Water unites. The construction of water supply systems was a large endeavour, which demanded the participation of many people with varied knowledge and skills. It encouraged innovation, development of construction materials, technology of metal processing, as well as time measuring devices, first water clocks, which were used to determine the duration of irrigation water use for every individual land owner. Construction workers used pipes to recreate siphons and enable sculptors to prove themselves with fountains, ornamental wells where water squirted in numerous streams from jars or heads of various creatures, from lions and dragons to humans. Fountains, water cascades and water mirrors inspired park designers, who used this primal element to recreate the image of paradise. Fountains adorned city squares and celebrated the human ability to control water. They were equal to arches of triumph, except that, instead of military victories, they glorified the water management and economical endeavours.

In Slovenian territories, potable water supply was

based on the capture of spring waters, on deep wells, which reached all the way to groundwater or underground rivers, and on the collection of rainwater. Animals were also allowed to drink water from the reservoirs, but where there was not much water, they used water from ponds, which were filled by rain. Some were natural, in other cases, people would carry clay into shallower basins and create them, and yet others were made with masonry. Special troughs were constructed for laundry, where we can still read warnings such as *Washing only allowed in washing through*. Older women still remember how they used to manually do laundry in the village through. In all seasons. The only difference was, that in the summer, the *large laundry* was done in the river. The time, when both children and adults would use buckets and jars to fetch water is not too far in the past either. No wonder, that the attitude towards wells was woven from love and hatred, so that many, in a time when the water was brought to their house through plumbing, and they did not have to fetch it any more, simply forgot about wells and small water basins.

There were only a few decorative wells in Slovenian territories. They could only be built, where water came to troughs from capture points and had enough pressure, to come out of the openings in a water jet. The simplest water capture points were set up like stepwells, where users descended the stairs deeper and deeper to reach the water surface and take water from it. Most underground wells ended with a "claw" - the constructed area above the ground, which usually consists of a stair, the floor ring, a straight or bulbous circumference and the mouth ring. Most claws are made of stone, mostly carved marble. Above the opening, often protected with a metal grille or cover, there is sometimes a canopy. The shallower wells were accessed simply with a bucket, tied onto a rope or chain, whereas elsewhere, there would be a metal construction

above the mouth ring with a spindle or pulley mounted onto it, which facilitated work. The more modern wells had manual or electric pumps. In fact, not two wells and not two claws are the same. Just as the water from them is always different. It often doesn't meet the modern criteria for potable water. In Slovenia, it is forbidden by law to use domestic water for drinking everywhere, where the plumbing network reaches the houses. Plumbing, leading to every building and thus every consumer, is one of the indicators of development. Ensuring potable water for everyone is one of the goals, written in the Declaration Of The New Millennium, adopted in the year 2000 by the United Nations Organisation. In the Goriška region, there are very few settlements, which would still depend exclusively on rainwater. There is nearly no lack of water. We have also forgotten the grudges we bore against wells. One generation built them, another forgot them and the third is getting excited about them once again. Some are watched over by the Institute For The Protection Of Natural And Cultural Heritage, while the maintenance of the others is an initiative of villagers, who are aware of the importance of maintaining the wells as a significant part of the technical culture of our predecessors and thus a part of our history. The importance of wells and ponds is being introduced to the pupils in elementary schools, while the tourist associations and unions include them among the sights, worth seeing in these parts.

Water lives again. We invite you to step on the path of discovery of wells and ponds from the rich heritage of self supply of inhabitants with water in five border municipalities of Goriška region. Each for itself and all together speak of the ingenuity and industriousness of people, who knew how to live in a greater harmony with nature than, perhaps, we do ourselves.

Nova Gorica



Podlaka

Orderly pond with two water collectors is only one of many, that have enabled the development of animal husbandry in the Karst world of the Banjška plain. The village Podlaga remains, even in the end of 2014, the only larger settlement in Goriška region, where the locals still depend on rainwater collection. A domestic expression for the claw of the well on the plain is throat, sometimes also 'firtoh' (apron). And by the way: one does not require a water permit for the rainwater wells and the same, of course, goes for ponds.

4



Grgarske Ravne

A fountain in the upper area of the village, named Grad, is one of the most magnificent maintained non - military structures, that were built during World War I by the Austro - Hungarian Soldiers along the Soča front. The periods of silence between offensives have been used to build a true monument, dedicated to water. Did they thus want to forget about the thirst in the trenches on the front lines? The well got water from the catch directly above it, where two larger troughs were placed, and which is also worth seeing. Together with the nearby chapel, the entire complex was also used for religious ceremonies. Judging by the inscription PRINZESSIN MARIE ANNA V. PARMA BRUNNEN, the soldiers dedicated the fountain to the arch - duchess, for whom, in her younger years, parents hoped that she will marry the heir to the throne, Franz Ferdinand, whose murder was the event that started the Great War. Water from the fountain is potable.

5



Preserje (fountain - pond)

A constructed water collector attracts attention due to being placed in an arched opening in a supporting wall around the houses in the highest part of the settlement. The end stone has the year of construction carved into it: 1867. Rainwater, flowing down the road from the courtyard, filled the stone pond, which was used by the inhabitants of the Krševanska vas village. Architecturally reshaped, it is a memory of old times and provides an opportunity for a chat in the shadow under the trellis. Next to the collector, there is a faucet with potable water in the wall above a stone through.

6



Preserje (Vidmarska štirna)

The well is filled by an underground stream which never dries out. All elements of the renovated well are designed according to the modern idea of beauty. The cleanliness of its lines is complemented by a wooden log, intended for the rest of the passers-by and gravel surroundings, while the pillars of the trellis over the manual water pump and a dry wall around it place it into the nature, which it belongs to. The locals hope, that they will receive a certificate on the potability of its water.

7



Šempas

The fountain at the edge of the village is a good example of village ingenuity and the desire of the simple man to unite the useful and the beautiful. From a higher background, the spring water entered the first through in a jet, now a faucet, and flowed from there into the drinking through, and lower still into a constant washing through. The statue on the fountain was christened as Brida by the locals, even though it is supposed to be a troubadour, but that does not matter at all. Actually it does: the water of Brida did not only quench thirst, but also carried the villagers into the wide world on the wings of imagination... Water is potable.

8



Šempeter- Vrt^ojba



Šempeter

The stone well with a built and plastered circumference and concrete mouth ring may be under lock and key, but, along with the stone wall around it and the majestic bell tower of the church in its background, it will certainly become of the popular Šempeter city sights. A simple claw is adorned by a three - armed framework with just as many pulleys, which is fairly unusual in these parts. The well is filled by groundwater. Incidentally: for the use of groundwater for personal needs, one must acquire a water permit in Slovenia, issued by the Agency Of The Republic Of Slovenia For Environment.

10



Vrtojba (Ulica 9. septembra)

The bottom of the simple well with a modern design of claw is as deep as 22 meters, but its builders were apparently not lucky in their choice of a digging location, as it is more often dry than full. The locals have thus more commonly used it to deposit the needless than for water supply. Perhaps this was the very reason why the stones of the initial claw were tossed into the well. Today, we can see them a few hundred meters to the South, where they are once again joined into a circumference close to the cemetery, reminding that only ephemerality is eternal.

11



Vrtojba (Krožna cesta)

The number of wells at Vrtojba makes us think, that the locals used water for things other than drinking and washing. The village, which was famous for early vegetables and other produce, used a lot of water for irrigation. The farmers supplied entire markets of Austro - Hungary with their produce, driven to the cities on simple push carts, burelas. Water from the well is considered potable, however, this well is sadly also under lock and key.

12



Vrtojba (Zapučke)

Writings on the well tell us a story of the constantly present wish of the locals for this well, placed right in the middle of a road, would be maintained alive. Separated framework carries two pulleys, which have not been used to lift water for a long time, as it is not considered the best in a village which (once) had 67 wells. The size of stones, making up the circumference, still gives the well a special value.

13



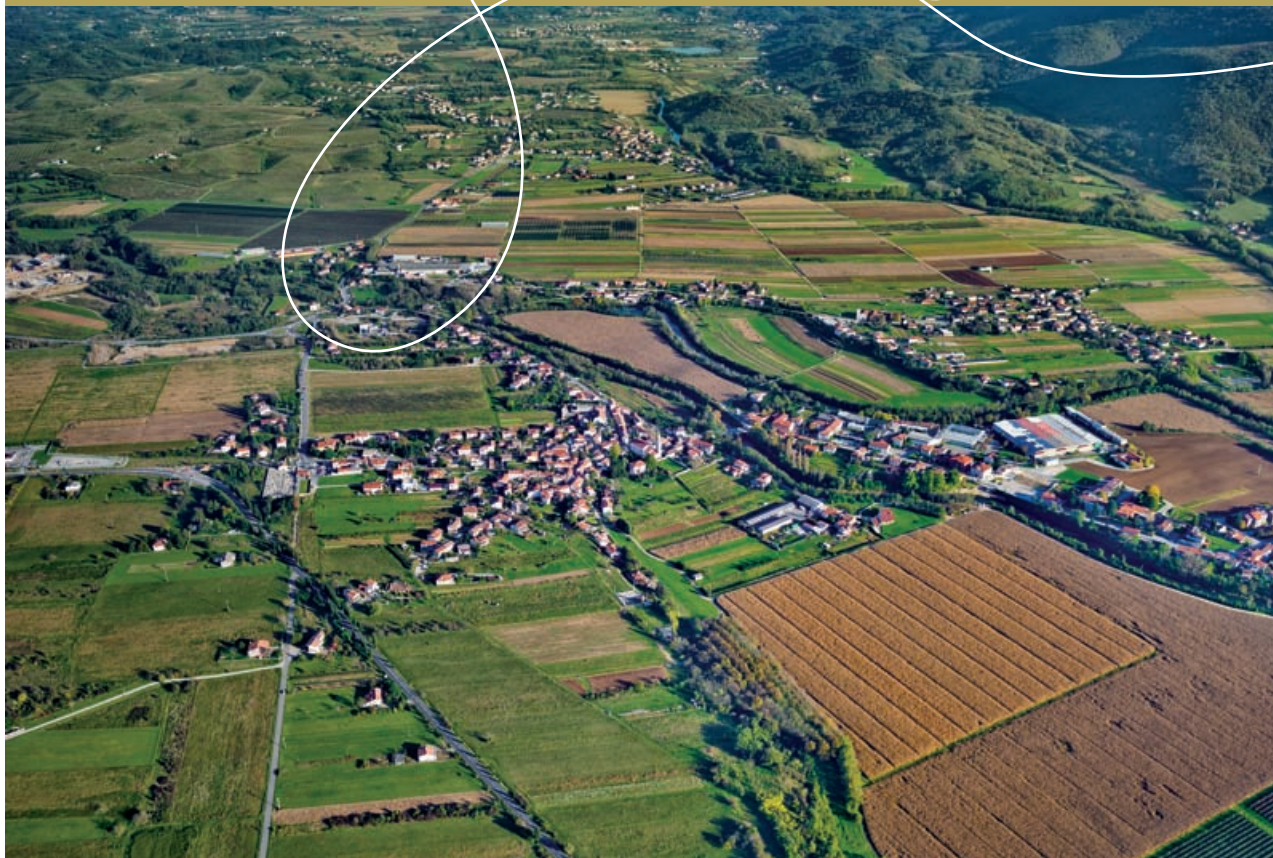
Vrtojba (Cesta na Čuklje)

Two arches compose a four - armed framework which, however, only bears two water lifting pulleys: it is truly unusual, how no two frameworks are the same! The claw is entirely new, assembled from large pieces of carved marble. The collector should unite both groundwater and rainwater, thus it never runs dry, however it is under lock and key.

14



Miren Kostanjevica



Bilje

Four pulleys over the claw serve as notable proof, that this well was used by many families from surrounding houses On The Hill. It is dug deep into the ground, where its collector is filled by groundwater. We can peek into it if we lift the metal lid above the opening. Its placement in the middle of the road plainly demonstrates the importance, which wells had as meeting points for villagers.

16



Orehovlje

A very deep well, dug into the pebble floor, filled by groundwater. Embossed stonework of the circumference gives the well an unusual appearance. Both here and on all other wells, decorative fittings for water lifting pulleys attract attention. A look into the well's innards shows, that the underground part is made of poured concrete.

17



Lokvica

The large pond at the edge of the village never ran out of water, nor did the two nearby collectors, which are filled by underground streams. Even though all three water surfaces are close to one another and even though this is a Karst area, only the water from one collector flows into the pond, while the other takes its own path. For this region, the use of a stepwell in one of the collectors is unique.

18



Nova vas

The water collector at the edge of the village was constructed with the purpose of serving as a pond. It has three built walls, while the fourth slowly descends, enabling the animals to reach water on their own. Renewed, it once again serves its purpose, as horses from the nearby estate like to quench their thirst in it. Rainwater flows into the pond from surrounding surfaces and must pass through sand and dirt catchers before pouring into the collector. Natural cleaning is ensured by islands of reeds, among which the leaves of water lilies grow, preventing an overly rapid drying out of the water.

19



Korita na Krasu

Rainwater, which flows down the road, enters a gutter with a sand catcher and from there a large water collector, intended mainly for livestock. Differently from the ponds, the water is not directly accessible, but must be poured into a nearby trough with a manual pump. Water is not potable.

20



Temnica

This is a real well with a lovely view, as the sight reaches all the way to the sea. Even though on top of the hill, on which the village church stands, roof surfaces of nearby buildings are large enough to make rainwater fill it quickly. A spindle was used to lift water. Nowadays, we can only look through the grille to see, what the level of water is. Otherwise a beautiful Karst square is somewhat abandoned these days, but maybe the renewal of the well is that, which brings it a new life...

21



Sela na Krasu

Clean lines, more straight than round, show that the design of this water collector was modern. It collects rainwater from nearby houses. The collector is covered by a panel with stone cobbles. Above its edge, over the small through, there is a manual pump. The water flows through pipes into an external through, intended for the livestock. Water is not potable.

22



Sovodnje ob Soči



Gabrje

The square is lonely in a hot, summer afternoon. The locals have closed the shutters and hid in houses, leafhoppers can be heard from the old wisteria. It has been long since anyone came for the water from this well, and it used to be so good! Nineteen meters deep, the well has been dug, to reach groundwater. In the days of drought, when there was less water and more thirst, the locals relied onto an even deeper well behind the nearby building, which once played host to a station of postal coaches. The village also had a third source of water, where they mainly led livestock and washed did their laundry.

24



Rupa

I sit and think: was the square built around the well, or did they dig deep enough in the middle of the square, to reach groundwater? A majestic well served the locals for constant supply of potable water, while the livestock was led to the Vipava river itself, which here, a bit before flowing into Soča river, shapes expressed meanders. As if it wanted to flow towards the sea on its own for as long as possible...

25



Sovodnje

Renovated well by the school building will certainly mainly draw the attention of the children, who will, through play, discover that water wasn't always a consumable at the reach of the hand, which flows from the tap in the wall or bathtub.

26



Vrh

A large pond in the vicinity of the settlement Devetaki sits at the meeting point of mountain and memorial paths today, which lead around the Goriška region Karst. In the immediate vicinity, there is a home of the speleological society Kraški Krti, who, upon agreement, guide the visitors into the largest and most beautiful underground cave in the surrounding area, the Kraljica Krasa - Queen of Karst. The area around the pond is a true oasis in the middle of the stony Karst world. You will meet no shepherds and the cattle has long since not been heard around the pond, but the water does attract timid deer and herds of wild boar, which dominate in the woods.

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Doberdob



Jamlje

A house built above the underground capture in Bared has a manual pump, with which water is lifted to the inner through, from where it flows into the outer through. The well served the entire village for water supply until the arrival of plumbing - for laundry and livestock water supply - while rainwater, collected by every house, was used for drinking. The water source was of a strategic importance for the Austro - Hungarian armies in this Karst section of the Soča front as well, while the Italian army constantly bombarded the village due to the water.

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Míkoli

For centuries, people cut down the forest and kept livestock or mowed grass in the cut areas. At Doberdob, the wood, mainly centennial oaks, dobi, were also cut for sale. The thickest still hold Venetian palaces above water to this day. What the hard working farmers did not cut down, grenades destroyed during World War I. The area is slowly being overgrown again nowadays. The trenches are covered by bushes, above which ever more thick treetops can be seen. The renovated ponds awaken memories of the ingenuity of locals, having managed to contain enough water for livestock, grazing in the rocky barrens, in a world where every drop of rain quickly sinks underground.

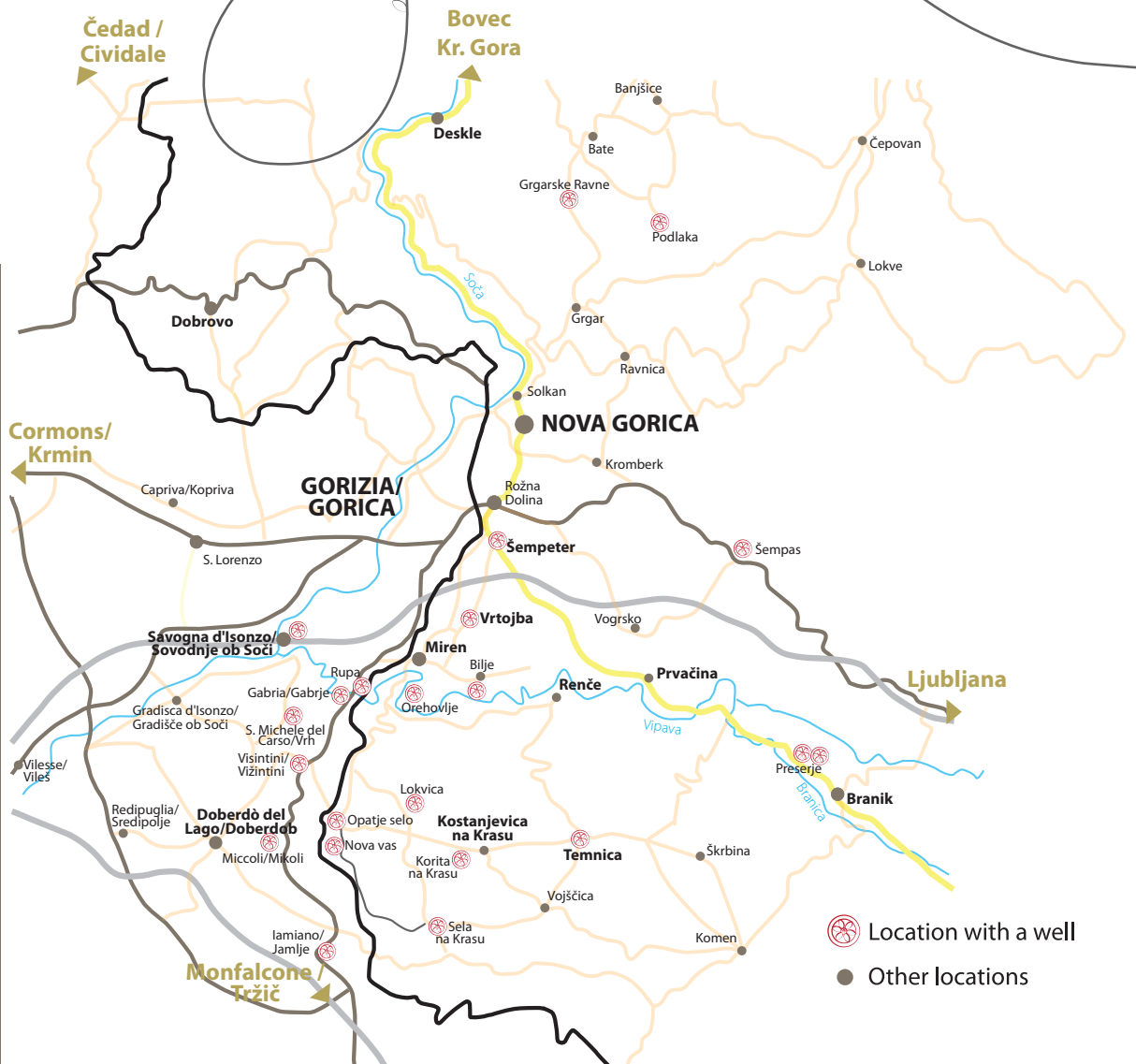


Vižintini

Do not be surprised if, next to the trough for horses, you see bands with the colours of the Hungarian Tricolour and hear an aged couple chat in Hungarian next to the nearby well. The trough was built by Hungarian soldiers during World War I. In the slaughter that seemed to have neither sense nor an end, they have found solace in constructing a fountain. Halfway between the well, which is filled from an underground water source, and the fountain for horses, there is a Hungarian chapel, dedicated to the memory of the ten thousand boys from the Pannonia plains, who fell on the rocky Karst ground. The beginning of the construction of a little church can be traced to the months after the last Soča offensive, while it was only finished and blessed in the year 2009, as the soldiers retreated in 1918, before completing the chapel.

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Published by
Občina Miren – Kostanjevica

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Translation
Forum center d.o.o.

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Design
Markacija d.o.o.

Printed by
Markacija d.o.o.

Edition
4000

This publication is available on the website
www.livingfountains.eu



»Publikacija sofinancirana v okviru Programa čezmejnega sodelovanja Slovenija-Italija 2007-2013 iz sredstev Evropskega sklada za regionalni razvoj in nacionalnih sredstev.
Pubblicazione finanziata nell'ambito del Programma per la Cooperazione Transfrontaliera Italia-Slovenia 2007-2013, dal Fondo europeo di sviluppo regionale e dai fondi nazionali.«

»Vsebinska publikacije ne odraža nujno uradnega stališča Evropske unije. Za vsebino publikacije je odgovorna izključno Občina Miren-Kostanjevica.
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Osnovna šola Ivana Roba Šempeter Pri Gorici



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Istituto comprensivo con lingua d'insegnamento Slovena di Doberdò Del Lago - Večstopenjska šola s slovenskim učnim jezikom v Doberdobu

Osnovna šola Miren

»Projekt LivingFountains sofinanciran v okviru Programa čezmejnega sodelovanja Slovenija – Italija 2007-2013 iz sredstev Evropskega sklada za regionalni razvoj in nacionalnih sredstev«

»Progetto LivingFountains finanziato nell'ambito del Programma per la Cooperazione Transfrontaliera Italia – Slovenia 2007-2013, dal Fondo europeo di sviluppo regionale e dai fondi nazionali«



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