Summary

The archaeological picture of Loški Potok, even if fragmentary, points to the settlement of this area in the first centuries of the first millennium BC. However, researchers allow for the possibility of an even older human presence in this area. We do not know exactly when today's settlement of Loški Potok was established, but mentions indicate as early as the end of the 15th century AD . The strategic location of Tabor Hill has been proven for centuries, as the inhabitants of Loški Potok used this place around 1500 as their first fortress, where they defended themselves and their livelihood from bandits, and later an anti-Turkish camp was established there. What drove people to the forested karst landscape, far from the wide plains and rolling hills? Was it the forests or the agrarian overpopulation elsewhere? Difficult natural conditions and a dangerous location due to exposure to Turkish invasions and other bandits hindered the smooth development of the Loški Potok and Draga Valley. Today we cannot imagine that the traditional cultural landscape, perhaps most typically reflected in the view from Tabor to Retje, reflects the centuries-long struggle of the people of Loški Potok and Draga Valley not only with nature, but also with various conquerors of the region.

The long, continuous presence of people on the territory of Loški Potok and Draga Valley has led to the development of special linguistic features, which are not uniform. In the villages of Mali Log, Retje, Hrib, Šegova vas, Srednja vas and Travnik, one of the local dialects of the tonemic Dolenjska dialect (southern) of western type is spoken, while in the villages of Lazec, Podpreska, Draga, Srednja vas pri Dragi, Stari and Novi Kot and Trava, the non-tonemic Kostel dialect is already spoken, and both belong to the Dolenjska dialect group.

The surface of the Loški Potok and Draga Valley landscape is now interpreted as a typical karst surface, which is also reshaped by forms of fluvial material transfer. In the elongated lowland that runs through the western part of the area, there are two typical karst fields: Retje and Travnik. According to the morphodynamic characteristics, the Retje field is defined as an occasional lake field and the Travnik field as an overflowing karst field. Occasional flooding also indicates land use and limits settlement of areas with regular flooding. Both fields are also distinct frost hollows and the settlements of Retje and Travnik are among the coldest settlements in Slovenia, alongside Babno Polje, Rakitna or the settlements on the plateau of Bloke. Although the inhabitants of Loški Potok have always been farmers, the climate is not particularly favourable for them, and in the past was even more unfavourable. The short growing season with frequent cold spells, which can bring frost from August to June, has given rise in folk tradition to the saying that winter in Loški Potok lasts nine months and then it is cold for three months.

Loški Potok and Draga Valley are relatively humid areas of Slovenia, especially in the higher parts of the region. Lower temperatures and reduced evaporation also contribute to humidification, but the actual availability of water on the predominantly

karstified surface is severely limited. Surface runoff is reduced due to the large forest cover that is a hallmark of the area. Nevertheless, the area has a higher than average runoff coefficient, reaching values between 60 and 70% of precipitation, which is above the Slovenian average (Frantar, 2008).

With a relatively high level of precipitation the region is thus wet, but due to the geological karst structure the water is more difficult to access, and the self-purifying power of the water is also limited. The extreme south-eastern part of the municipality of Loški Potok, which does not belong to the Loški Potok - Draga Valley region, stands out from this framework. Here is the headwaters of the Čabranka river, practically the only part of the Loški Potok municipality with fluvial relief and the most water-rich river course. The source of the Čabranka is a karst spring, but the water-resistant geological base enables its surface drainage towards Osilnica, where it flows into the Kolpa River.

In addition to geomorphological and hydrological features, the geological structure also determines the pedogenetic processes, of which the following are predominant in Loški Potok and Draga Valley : Humus accumulation, slow weathering of the hard carbonate parent rock and rather modest formation of fine soil particles. As a result, young soil stages are predominant, which are shallow, have a low clay content and high reaction (the pH fluctuates around the neutral value). Due to the carbonate parent rock, the saturation with bases is high. These factors, processes and general characteristics were also confirmed by field research at 48 sites. Accordingly, in the Loški Potok municipality Rendzina is predominant, appearing on up to 64% of the area, followed by brown Chromic Cambisolsoils with 33%. A modest proportion of Dystric Brown soils occur in the extreme south, and in some places Eutric Brown soils occur in the bottom of the elongated lowland. The agrarian settlement of Loški Potok and the Draga Valley is also reflected in a very special cultural landscape, which occupies a special place among Slovenian landscapes. The landscape features in the municipality of Loški Potok are shaped by natural or culturally determined landscape elements and patterns. In some cases, the natural morphology carries built accents such as churches and chapels, such as Tabor hill with two churches and a cemetery, and the church in Draga with linden trees, which stands on a hill in front of the village in a place visible from both Podpreska and Srednja vas near Draga.

Other landscape elements are individual trees or groups of trees on farmland, usually lime trees, which often mark crosses, chapels, and churches, or other types of fruit or forest trees along roads; orchards; shrub vegetation; patches of forest on steeper parts of depressions; stone walls along some field paths, puddles or ponds; springs; rocks on farmland; streambeds of permanent and occasional streams, etc.

A study of the vulnerability of the municipality of Loški Potok showed a moderate impact of human activities. In most geo-ecological units air and water quality assessments reach a state of low pollution, due to the low density of settlements and population. The situation is different in the settlements in the karst fields of Retje and Travnik. Due to the lower self-cleaning capacity of the atmosphere in the two depressions, even a small number of households in winter causes air pollution with black carbon (BC) and particulate matter comparable to that of larger cities in valleys and

basins. The measurements also show that particulate air pollution in smaller populated hollows in rural areas can be much higher than is generally assumed.

At the time of the temperature inversions, the inhabitants of the bottom of both karst fields are most exposed to high concentrations of BC and PM particles. The measured concentrations of the pollutants in question during the winter temperature inversions are of great concern, as in the evenings they reach the level of the most polluted areas in the world, such as the city of Delhi in India (Apte et al., 2011; Goel et al., 2015; WHO, 2016).

How should this area develop in the future? Although it is a sensitive karst area with limited carrying capacity, for the preservation of the traditional cultural landscape, its functions and structure, depopulation of the area and aging are also problematic processes. In addition, environmental changes due to climate change will shape the Dinaric regions, which include Loški Potok and Dragarska dolina, in the coming decades. The traditional and recognized cultural landscape of Loški Potok and Dragarska dolina must find a place in the municipal development plans for the coming decades. The municipality should continue the transition to renewable energy sources (biomass, wind energy), support the maintenance of quality forests and wood processing, strengthen local entrepreneurship, including forms of rural tourism, and mitigate the effects of transport-related remoteness by accelerating digitalization.