

01.a

Fieldwork – Italo-Austrian Border

21-25.05.2024

PRIN 2022 research project

Italian Borderscapes After 2020:
Mapping, Unfolding, Re-Framing Border Territories
in Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic



Finanziato
dall'Unione europea
NextGenerationEU



Ministero
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Italiadomani
PIANO NAZIONALE
DI RIFORMA E SICUREZZA



**POLITECNICO
MILANO 1863**
DIPARTIMENTO DI ARCHITETTURA
E STUDI URBANI



Consiglio Nazionale
delle Ricerche



01.a Fieldwork Report: Italo-Austrian Border

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Contents

Credits	p.2
Premises	
“Italian Borderscapes after 2020” research project	p.5
Aim of this report	p.6
Methodological note	p.7
List of interviews	p.9
Synthetic Agenda	p.12
Daily Activities and Documentation	p.15
Reflections on the fieldwork's process	p.40
Contacts	p.41



01

Premises

Italian Borderscapes after 2020

Mapping Unfolding, and Re-framing Border Territories in Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic

Abstract

The project aims to investigate the impacts of a set of **interconnected crises**, encompassing socio-economic, humanitarian, ecological, and health-related challenges, including the Covid-19 pandemic, which have significantly affected Italian border areas in recent years. Rather than framing these regions solely as 'border areas' or 'peripheries,' we adopt the concept of '**borderscape**' to address the **complex entanglement** and '**constellations**' of **spaces, relations, and practices** that shape these territories. The primary focus of the study is to map, analyse, and understand the complex intertwining of (old and new) re-bordering, de-bordering and cross-bordering processes that have emerged along and across Italy's borders prior to and following the 2020 pandemic. To do so, the project will delve into **three case studies** located on Italian national borders (Italy-France, Italy-Austria and Italy-Slovenia), allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the diverse challenges and opportunities faced by these regions.

Main objectives

1. **Re-frame** cross-border cooperation and border management mechanisms in Europe before and after 2020, and **understand** what happened across and along EU member states' borders in the past years, with a specific focus on the Italian context and its bilateral relations;
2. **Identify** in three study contexts both: a) the new territorial **fragilities** pushed by the multiple crisis; b) the **synergies and coping strategies** that have been activated by alliances of local stakeholders and citizens to provide bottom-up and/or institutional responses to the social and economic distresses caused by the sanitary emergency.
3. **Explore** pathways of **resilient territorial development** among cross-border territories in a permanent crisis conditions / post-pandemic recovery phase, considering their (old and new) interdependencies, integrating the existing strategies, plans and policies at the regional and local scale.

Website: <https://www.italianborderscapes.polimi.it>

Aim of this report

This document aims to provide an overview of the **direct observations, informal meetings and interactions**, and **semi-structured interviews** organized and performed on site during the **fieldwork** mission along and across the Italian-Austrian border between May 21 and 25, 2024.

The organization of the fieldwork involved a series of preparatory activities and networking efforts prior to the proper site visits and explorations and engaged the project's team at different levels, from the identification of the itineraries to the scheduling of appointments. However, a significant portion of the agenda was left to spontaneous and in-progress explorations and meeting opportunities, maintaining a certain level of **flexibility and openness**.

The methods and approaches adopted are drawn on **participatory action research theories** which entails the **co-production of knowledge** among researchers and other actors (experts and non-experts, institutional and non-institutional). Smith & Jenkins (2015)¹ suggest the relevance and use of action-research in territorial contexts defined by high degrees of complexity (such as border regions) “to engage with the key actors from the beginning and use the research process itself as a tool to this end, with a view to affecting policy as it is formed” (*ibidem*).

¹ Smith, H. and Jenkins, P. (2015). Trans-disciplinary research and strategic urban expansion planning in a context of weak institutional capacity: Case study of Huambo, Angola. *Habitat International*, 46, 244-251.

Methodological Note

Interviews

An important part of the research programme consists in leading interviews with actors and experts involved in the governance, management, and study of the cross-border regions involved in the project, at various scales.

- The '**regional level**' interviews were held mostly **online** with regional institutions, cross-border governance authorities and experts;
- The '**local level**' interviews were held in a **hybrid** mode with mayors, local institutions, and stakeholders (associations, workers unions, NGOs).

To enable scientific coding and comparison, the interviews follow a standardised grid centred on the research's main themes: cross-border cooperation, polycrisis, resilience, future perspectives, and personal perception of the border. The MAXQDA software is used to code and analyse the interviews. Results will be available in an *ad hoc* report.

Participative mapping

The in-person interviews are completed by a participatory mapping activity, in which interviewees are asked to spatialize a list of **daily activities** (ie: schools, workplaces, grocery, etc.) and less frequent use of (wider range) **collective services** (ie: hospitals, universities, etc.), by placing coloured pins on a map. The border line is purposefully omitted from the base map: only border crossings are indicated. Though anecdotal, this exercise enables to gain insight on the extent and intensity of cross-border recursive and non-recursive living practices.



Participative
mapping
activity.
(Sillian,
Austria,
22.05.2024)



Participative
mapping
example.
(Nova Gorica,
Slovenia,
29.05.2024)

List of interviews

INTERVIEWS LEVEL 1 - REGIONAL LEVEL				
code	country	category	role	modality
ITAT_01_01	ITALY	Institution member	Head of the European Integration of the Province of Bozen/Bolzano	online
ITAT_01_02	ITALY	Expert	Researcher on the topic of autonomy and regionalism	online
ITAT_01_03	ITALY	Association member	Coordinator of the Regional Management LAG Pustertal/Val Pusteria	online
ITAT_01_04	ITALY	Institution member	Head of the provincial warning centre	online
ITAT_01_05	AUSTRIA	Association member	Employee Regions Management LAG Osttirol	online
ITAT_01_06	ITALY	Institution member	Secretary general of GECT Italy-Austria	online
ITAT_01_07	ITALY	Institution member	Referent Unit of Regional Coordination Veneto	online

INTERVIEWS LEVEL 2 - LOCAL LEVEL				
code	country	category	role	modality
ITAT_02_01	ITALY	Institution member	Mayor of Innichen/San Candido	in-person
ITAT_02_02	ITALY	Association member	Employee of the Tourism Association in Innichen/San Candido	in-person
ITAT_02_03	AUSTRIA	Institution member	Mayor of Sillian	in-person
ITAT_02_04	AUSTRIA	Institution member	Former mayor of Sillian	in-person
ITAT_02_05	AUSTRIA	Association member	Member of the Farmers Association of Sillian	in-person
ITAT_02_06	ITALY	Institution member	Council member and local entrepreneur of Innichen/San Candido	in-person
ITAT_02_07	ITALY	Association member	Employee of the Tourism Association in Innichen/San Candido	in-person
ITAT_02_08	ITALY	Association member	Head of the volunteer fire fighters of Innichen/San Candido	in-person
ITAT_02_09	ITALY	Institution member	Teacher	in-person
ITAT_02_10	ITALY	Association member	Member of the Farmers Association of Innichen/San Candido	in-person
ITAT_02_11	ITALY	Private Person	Former teacher	In-person
ITAT_02_12	AUSTRIA	Private Person	Bank employee	online
ITAT_02_13	AUSTRIA	Association member	Employee of the Tourism Association in Sillian	online
ITAT_02_14	AUSTRIA	Private Person	Entrepreneur	online
ITAT_02_15	AUSTRIA	Institution member	Teacher in Sillian	online



02

Synthetic Agenda

Synthetic Agenda

21/05/2024 | TUESDAY

SILLIAN (AT)

Arrival in Sillian

22/05/2024 | WEDNESDAY

SILLIAN (AT) – INNICHEN/SAN CANDIDO (IT) – SILLIAN (AT)

Exploration of Sillian

Interview with the mayor of Sillian

Interview with the former mayor of Sillian

Interview with the mayor of Innichen/San Candido

23/05/2024 | THURSDAY

INNICHEN/SAN CANDIDO (IT)

Interviews with tourism representatives of Innichen/San Candido (IT)

Interview with farmers' representative of Sillian (AT) in Innichen/San Candido (IT)

Interview with local entrepreneur in tourism of Innichen/San Candido (IT)

24/05/2024 | FRIDAY

INNICHEN/SAN CANDIDO (IT)

Interview with teachers' representative, Innichen/San Candido (IT)

Interview with firefighter, Innichen/San Candido (IT)

Interview with farmers' representative, Innichen/San Candido (IT)

Interview with former mayor of Innichen/San Candido (IT)

Interview with former teacher, Innichen/San Candido (IT)

25/05/2024 | SATURDAY

DRAU-CYCLE-PATH INNICHEN/ SAN CANDIDO (IT) – LIENZ (AT)

Exploration of the cross-border Drau-cycle-path from Innichen/San Candido to Lienz





03

**Daily activities and
Documentation**

Tuesday, 21st May 2024

SILLIAN (AT)

19.00 Arrival in Sillian

Notes

The first day of activities in Sillian begins in the evening. Upon arrival we notice significant differences in our **travel experience**. As a resident of the Puster Valley, it was easier for me (Alessandra) to reach Sillian (Austria) than the regional capital, Bozen/Bolzano (Italy). In contrast, my colleague (Emanuela) felt like she had entered a different Italy as early as Verona. To continue her journey to Austria, she was directed to the German train operator Deutsche Bahn rather than Trenitalia, even though most of her route was on Italian territory.

Rather than experiencing a stark contrast with the South Tyrolean side, the hotel staff in Sillian maintains bilingual communication in German and Italian, providing a seamless transition into Austria. This continuity is further reinforced by bilingual menus in restaurants, catering to both Italian- and German-speaking guests.



Sign in Sillian.
(25.05.2024)

Observations from the preparation for the fieldwork

The organization of the fieldwork held different priorities for our team. We quickly agreed upon using public transport for the trips between Innichen/San Candido and Sillian and bicycles to reach places not accessible with public transport, though these locations would be exceptions, as most of our time was spent in the town centres due to a tight schedule. I could simply take a train to Innichen/San Candido and Sillian, but my colleague had to plan her arrival to the place of fieldwork more carefully as she was coming from Rome. The next consideration regards accommodation. While Innichen/San Candido offered plenty of options, especially in the off-season, those options were often overwhelmingly expensive. In contrast, Sillian had fewer options, but they were much more affordable and of high quality. The service in Sillian was notably more personal, reflecting a gentler approach to tourism compared to the heavily touristic atmosphere of Innichen/San Candido.



Hotel menu in German and Italian in our hotel in Sillian. (22.05.2024)

Wednesday, 22nd May 2024

SILLIAN (AT) – INNICHEN/SAN CANDIDO (IT) – SILLIAN (AT)

9.00 Exploration of Sillian

11.00 Interview with mayor of Sillian

12.00 Interview with former mayor of Sillian

14.30 Exploration of the border area

15.00 Interview with mayor of Innichen/San Candido

Exploration of Sillian

Time: 9.00

Location: Sillian (AT)

Visual and sensual exploration of Sillian

Sillian has a **quaint town centre** with a fountain, an old church tower bell on display and a pavilion. The pavilion and fire station were decorated with coniferous branches and a maypole for the upcoming celebration of the 120-year anniversary of the volunteer firefighters of Sillian. The volunteer firefighters play an important role in Austrian and in South Tyrolean society as only larger cities host professional fire brigades. In smaller towns like Sillian, volunteers take on the primary responsibility not only for firefighting, but also providing technical support for accidents and civil protection.

The centre has a café, a bank, a supermarket, a toy store, a paper store, a chemist, a restaurant and a clothing store. On the hill, starting in the centre, stands out the church with a big graveyard. We only notice one Italian-sounding name on the gravestones. I notice the name “Vollgger” though, which is phonetically closer to my **names’ spelling** “Volgger”.

Sillian seems to be oriented towards **car-users** with a lack of walkways outside of the centre and a high number of available parking spaces. The only people walking at this time of the day are myself, some elderly women and mothers with prams (it is a Wednesday morning though).



View Gasthaus-
Pizzeria center
Sillian.
(22.05.2024)



View banks
and main road
center Sillian.
(22.05.2024)



View center
Sillian.
(22.05.2024)



View pavilion
center Sillian.
(22.05.2024)



View chemist
main road
center Sillian.
(22.05.2024)



Volunteer
firefighters
with maytree
Sillian.
(22.05.2024)



View religious
statue and
pavilion center
Sillian
(22.05.2024)



View café
center Sillian.
(22.05.2024)

Exploration of Sillian

Time: 11.00 – 16.00

Location: Municipality Sillian (AT) and municipality Innichen/San Candido (IT)

Interviewees: Mayor of Sillian, former Mayor of Sillian, Mayor of Innichen/San Candido

Notes

Our arrival in Innichen/San Candido highlighted the differences between the town and Sillian. Upon arriving by car, it was rather difficult to find a parking spot close to the centre. Movement into the town centre was also easier on foot, as there were continuous walkways for pedestrians and cyclists.

Institutional and practical cross-border practice in past and present

During our interview with the Mayor of Sillian a particular attention was devoted to the **institutionalisation of cross-border practices** and **challenges** associated with it. He mainly highlighted a well-established **educational cooperation** between the schools of Sillian and Toblach/Dobbiaco, where the students participate in excursions and educational activities together. The most recent among those activities at the time of the interview was a “cycle-day” on the Italian side of the border. Although somewhat reluctantly, the discussion also touched on the impacts of current **crises**, particularly the effects of the climate emergency on the area. Both Sillian and Innichen/San Candido had already experienced issues with flooding of the shared “Erlbach”, often referred to as “Grenzbach” (Border River) by local residents.

Similar issues were discussed with the former Mayor of Sillian. Regarding the challenges to cooperation, he highlighted the **lack of flexibility, the absence and reluctance of authorities, and a deep-rooted adherence to national borders**. This is reflected in the lack of information for local officials and the disproportionate financial burden placed on smaller communities. Furthermore, the former Mayor spoke about how existing business cooperation is frequently being hindered by the Carabinieri stopping Austrian cars and workers, sometimes towing their vehicles. **Potential challenges** discussed included inflated housing costs, increased traffic, and a decline in volunteer activities following the first Covid-19 outbreak.

During our interview, the Mayor of Innichen/San Candido highlighted **informal cooperation initiatives**, such as the collaboration between the volunteer firefighters. He also **emphasised connecting factors** like shared social clubs and regular exchange between municipal officers. **Early Covid-19 mitigation measures**, such as border closures and differing mitigation regimes, were

discussed as significant challenges to cross-border cooperation. Furthermore, the Mayor noted that **increase in bureaucracy** due to differing administrative regimes is not conducive to closer cooperation, suggesting that a **stronger supra-national or regional framework** could offer a possible solution.

However, the border itself was described as an **asset for tourism**, enhancing rather than diminishing the area's appeal.

All interviewees participated in the **mapping exercise**. The two current mayors illustrated their movements on both the Italian and Austrian sides of the border, mostly attending events on the corresponding "other side". The former mayor of Sillian also demonstrated wide-ranging movements, but mostly within Austria, rather than focusing on the Austrian-Italian borderscapes.



Interview with
mayor and
former mayor
of Sillian at the
municipality in
Sillian.
(22.05.2024)



Participative
mapping with
mayor of
Innichen/ S.C.
at the
municipality in
Innichen/ S.C.
(22.05.2024)

Direct observations of the context

Following recommendations from our interviewees in Sillian, we had lunch at the “**Puschtra Alm**”, which is a restaurant in Weitlanbrunn, serving **typical South- and East Tyrolean dishes, as well as pizza**. The interior and exterior as well as the food could place the restaurant on either side of the border. Both guests and staff spoke German and Italian. Located 1,5 km from the border, the restaurant attracts customers from both Italy and Austria, with many of the lunchtime customers being workers.

After our meal, we crossed into Italy to meet our next interviewee in Innichen/San Candido. While the Austrian side of the **border area** now houses a lumber yard, the Italian side has orderly parking spots in front of the “Pizzeria Tempele”, where a **Carabinieri patrol** was flagging down vehicles to control. Our overall impression of the border area was that it functions as both a **service area** for short stays and a **converted or neglected passageway**.

Thursday, 23rd May 2024

SILLIAN (AT) – INNICHEN/S. C. (IT)

- 9.00 Travel to Innichen/San Candido (IT)
- 10.30 Interview with tourism association representatives
- 12.30 Interview with farmers' representative (Sillian)
- 16.00 Interview with bar owner

Interviews with associations in business, agriculture and tourism of Sillian (AT) and Innichen/San Candido (IT)

Time: 10.30 – 17.00

Location: Tourism association – main square Innichen/San Candido, Café Silvia – main square Innichen/San Candido, Bar da Marco – main square Innichen/San Candido

Interviewees: two members of the tourism association, one member of the agricultural association and one local entrepreneur in tourism

Presence of cross-border relations or perspectives in the sectors of tourism, agriculture and business

The tourism association's office is located inside a **historic building right in the city centre** of Innichen/San Candido. Our interviewees reported minimal to no cooperation in their sector, attributing it to a lack of effort to collaborate from both sides. While there are **ideas for cooperation** - such as the respective civil bands playing at each other's' events or the Austrians contributing to the historic market held in Innichen/San Candido once a year -, there is a **lack of commitment** to put these ideas into action. An important point stressed by the interviewees is the **history** of the border, to which they believe should be given more attention. With regard to crises, our interviewees primarily referred to a past perceived crisis: **migration**.

According to the interviewees, the issue stemmed from two key concerns. On one hand, some migrants were housed in accommodation in Innichen/San Candido, which led to fears among certain residents that the migrants might be violent criminals, bringing crime and unrest to the town. On the other hand, migrants hoping to cross into Austria would gather at the Innichen/San Candido train station, attempting to make the journey by train. However, as border police frequently intercepted and sent them back, many migrants spent extended periods at the station, often staying there overnight while waiting for another

opportunity to leave. This presence, coupled with fears of criminality, left some residents feeling unsafe at the station.

Although this particular crisis is now largely in the past, members of local associations noted a recent increase in the number of migrants seen at the train station. However, they emphasized that these numbers are only a fraction of those observed during earlier events, such as in 2011.

When speaking about their **movement across the border**, one interviewee highlighted the Austrian area as a beautiful destination for hiking and cycling. While they also mentioned visiting the large supermarkets in Sillian for grocery shopping, their colleague took a contrasting stance, emphasizing their effort to buy everything locally to support the regional economy and create value for South Tyrol.



View main square Innichen/ S.C., left yellow building: Tourism Association, right white building: municipality. (23.05.2024)

Our interviewee from the Agricultural Association began by reflecting on their own **identity**, noting that their **partners are South Tyrolean** and therefore having closer ties to the people on the Italian side of the border. Furthermore, they were able to form **important relationships** there through their work, which would continue into their present role as an entrepreneur with Italian clients and as a farmer. Their cross-border connections extend beyond personal relationships, encompassing collaborations through the farmers' association with their equivalent across the border. A key aspect for farmers living near the border is the shared "**Grenzalm**", a communal pasture where farmers on both the Italian and Austrian side bring their cattle to graze. This historical practice dates back to generations but was halted during the times of absolute closure of the border after World War II until 1951.

During our interview with a local entrepreneur in the tourism sector the discussion centred on **identity**, **historical development**, and **perceived fears**. The interviewee talked about their own history and sense of identity as a "**Walscher**" (a slang term for "Italian") in Innichen/San Candido, tracing their family roots back to their great-grandparents from Trentino. They placed this sense of identity and belonging in both historical and contemporary contexts, contrasting it with the fear some local residents have towards migrants. While this respondent acknowledged a **historical hatred** or antipathy towards Italian people and their culture, they argue that this hatred should have no place in **contemporary society**. Similarly to the two interviewees from the tourism association, they also recounted an incident when **refugees** were settled in an accommodation in Innichen/San Candido. They described the anticipatory fear among residents likening it to "an angry mob with pitchforks and torches". However, they noted that when the refugees actually arrived, the initial tension quickly subsided. Residents soon realized that these refugees were not violent criminals as feared but rather ordinary people.



Mapping with
interviewee at
Café Silvia.
(23.05.2024)



Interview at
Bar da Marco.
(23.05.2024)

Friday, 24th May 2024

INNICHEN/SAN CANDIDO (IT)

- 08.00 Interview with middle school teachers' representative (Innichen/San Candido)
- 09.00 Interview with fire fighter
- 11.00 Interview with a farmers' representative (Innichen/San Candido)
- 15.00 Interview with former mayor Innichen/San Candido
- 16.00 Interview with former teacher Innichen/San Candido

Interviews with teachers' and fire fighters' representatives

Time: 8.00 – 10.00

Location: Café Silvia – main square Innichen/ San Candido

Interviewees: teachers' and fire fighters' representatives

Cross-border relations and polycrisis in disaster management and in the educational sector

During our interview with a **teachers' representative**, the respondent mentioned a **shared mentality** among communities across the border. When discussing crises, they noted that **Covid-19** was perceived as impactful, however, referring primarily to the community of Innichen/San Candido rather than regarding the border area.



Interview and mapping
Burgmann Café
Silvia.
(23.05.2024)

They explained that movement limitations were already in place within the region, so restrictions between Innichen/San Candido and Sillian were no different from those between Innichen/San Candido and Toblach/Dobbiaco. Other crises regarding Innichen/San Candido, though not directly related to the border, included the high cost of living and the limited availability of affordable housing options.

During our interview with a **fire fighters' representative**, the respondent noted that despite the significant challenges posed by the **climate emergency**, the **cooperation** with the fire-fighting organisation across the border works well. For this reason the respondent would not qualify neither the climate emergency nor the emergence of Covid-19 to qualify as a crises in their operational context.

The discussion also touched on **differing administrative regimes** which can pose challenges to their activities. However, these are often addressed through **informal strategies** in order to be able to respond more swiftly. On a formal institutional level, the respondent highlighted the importance of the **Interreg project "Öko-Drau"** which was initiated 15 years ago. This project resulted in the creation of a cross-border emergency plan, marking a significant step in fostering collaboration and preparedness.



Interview
Bergmann Café
Silvia
(23.05.2024)

Interview farmers' representative for Innichen/ San Candido

Time: 11.00

Location: Egarterhof – Vierschach/ Versciaco (IT)

Interviewee: farmers' representative Sillian (AT)

Cross-border relations and polycrisis in the agricultural sector

The interviewee from the farmers' association emphasized the **differing mentalities** on either side of the border. While they acknowledged the **EU** as an institution promoting cross-border relations, they pointed out that the Union hasn't yet been successful in fully overcome **national thinking**. The respondent shared that, although they use services on the Austrian side of the border – such as postal services, shopping and cultural events – the national borders remain a lasting presence in peoples' minds. Crises such as the **bark beetle infestation or the inflated cost of living** are felt also across the border, according to the interviewee. They stressed that addressing these issues requires cross-border cooperation. Their hope to achieve greater cooperation rests on the EU and other supra-national institutions.



Egarterhof
"Stube".
(23.05.2024)



Egarterhof.
(23.05.2024)



View on
Innichen/ San
Candido.
(23.05.2024)

Interview former Mayor of Innichen/San Candido

Time: 15.00

Location: Municipality Innichen/San Candido

Interviewee: Former Mayor of Innichen/San Candido

Cross-border relations from a historical perspective and their connection to the contemporary polycrisis

By co-founding the “**Süd-Osttirol-Kontakt-Komitee**” (South - East Tyrol - Contact -Committee), the interviewee contributed substantially to the formalisation of cross-border relations. This committee was founded to foster cross-border cooperation between South- and East Tyrol, with a particular focus on cultural, economic and social exchange. Committees like this play an important role in upholding a shared history and identity, often cooperating with other organisations and committees. According to the respondent, the **historical commonalities** between these regions have suffered during the years of partition, and rebuilding these connections has been slow and difficult.



Interview at the municipality Innichen/San Candido. (23.05.2024)

Interview former teacher

Time: 16.00

Location: Café Silvia (Innichen/ S.C.)

Interviewee: former teacher

Cross-border relations in the educational sector from a historical point of view and their connection to the contemporary polycrisis

Starting with the topic of **identity**, this interviewee highlighted their strong connection to Carinthia and Graz due to their educational trajectory. In terms of cross-border relations to Sillian, they are seen as a **coexistence** rather than shared living, as basic services such as **health care or education** are increasingly bound to national borders. This is a particular issue for the German-speaking majority in South Tyrol, as it is often impossible to be treated in their mother tongue in the region's more equipped hospitals, such as those in Bozen/Bolzano or Meran/Merano where many health care workers speak only Italian. Other crises highlighted included the emergence of **the Covid-19 pandemic**, the rising cost of living, over-tourism and the climate emergency. Having grown up with closed borders, the interviewee shared some important historical insights into border life, recounting **informal border-crossings, friendly relations with the border agents** and the importance of the **train-connection** between Lienz and Innichen/San Candido in keeping people connected during the partition period.

Saturday, 25th May 2024

INNICHEN/ SAN CANDIDO (IT) – LIENZ (AT)

10.00 Drau-cycle-path from Innichen/ San Candido (IT) over Sillian (AT) to Lienz (AT)

Drau-Cycle-Path

Time: 10.00

Location: Innichen/ San Candido (IT) – Sillian (AT) – Lienz (AT)

By bike

Exploring the borderscapes by bike

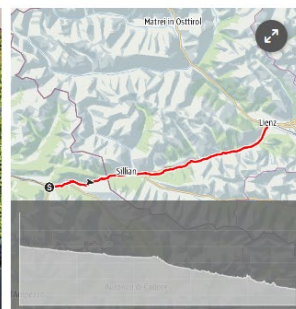
This is a very **popular cycle-path** starting in Toblach/Dobbiaco, crossing Lienz, Spittal, Villach, Ferlach, and Lavamünd to Dravograd, Maribor, and finally Varažnin. It runs alongside the railway line and connects mountain formations, lakes, and villages. It is being advertised as offering “borderless cultural riches and regional cousin in the tri-border area of Austria, Italy and Slovenia” (source: drauradweg.com). The Drau cycle path is 510km long and I completed the 1st part from Innichen to Lienz, then returned by train. It was coincidentally also Euregio-day, which ensured more Italian visitors in Lienz, as the train was free.



Drau-Cycle-Path map. Source: drauradweg.com

TOP Drauradweg Etappe 1: Toblach-Lienz/Pustertal

Fernradweg · Hochpustertal



Description of part 1 of the Drau-Cycle-Path.

Source:

<https://www.drauradweg.com/de/etappen/etappenraum>

= [1/unterkuenfte](https://www.drauradweg.com/de/etappen/etappenraum)





The green border, view from Drau-Cycle-Path Italian side. (24.05.2024)



Crossing from Italy into Austria on the Drau-Cycle-Path. (24.05.2024)



04

**Reflections on the
fieldwork's process**

Means of Transportation

Sillian and Innichen/San Candido are both rural towns with walkable town centres and a good train connection between them. Therefore, moving around with public transport was generally effective. However, there are exceptions, where a car would have been more useful. We had originally planned a different meeting point with the Sillian farmers' association representative, but had to reschedule due to the rain. The original plan was to cycle to a restaurant at the border, gather observations during the bike ride and then gather observations of the border area on the way back. Luckily, our interviewee offered to instead come to Innichen/San Candido for the interview. A similar situation occurred on the last day, while we cycled from Innichen/San Candido to Lienz.

Even without the rain, the limitations of connections to more remote places from the town centre was challenging. Many places along the border, like the Grenzalm or the fields along the border, or the bunker museum, could not be explored in this instance. We went to the Egarterhof with our bikes, but it took us a long time and was a rather challenging physical feat for anyone not used to cycling in the mountains.

Time Limitation

Another challenging factor was the time limitation on the fieldwork. In order to interview the amount of people necessary for the analysis, the schedule was densely packed, leaving little time for exploration and spontaneous meetings. Excursions, such as the one to the Egarterhof or to the border area, had to be carefully scheduled. It also put a limitation on the methods we could use to gather information and engage with our respondents.

Trust and accessibility

The limited amount of time spent in Innichen/San Candido and Sillian also put certain interpersonal restrictions on the research. We struggled to find respondents, who were not only willing to talk to us, but also represented different segments and perspectives of the local residency. While we had already interviewed a few institutional respondents, these were limited and many of the other individuals we contacted never responded to our attempts. After the first interviews, however, we were able to gather one or two additional contacts from our respondents and include them in the process. Maybe more time in the field and a more solid basis of trust would have allowed us more and more diverse contacts enriching the research.

Language and belonging

An immense advantage was my identity. Me being a German-speaking “Puschtrarin” (from the Puster Valley) allowed for the creation of a fast mutual understanding, the more comfortable partial use of dialect in the interviews and a faster connection between me as a researcher and the interviewees, putting them at ease in a rather awkward situation. I also had important knowledge about the historical development and present situation in the region, not just as a researcher, but also as an insider living in the area.

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