

01.b

Fieldwork – Italo-Slovenian Border

26-31.05.2024

PRIN 2022 research project

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



01.b Fieldwork Report: Italo-Slovenian Border

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Partners

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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-Slovenian border between May 26 and 31, 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
ITSL_01_01	SLOVENIA	institution member	Slovenia's representative for the Interreg programme Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, Interreg and Financial Mechanisms Office	online
ITSL_01_02	ITALY	institution member	Director of International relations and European planning Friuli-Venezia Giulia Region	online
ITSL_01_03	ITALY	expert	Associate professor of Cultural Anthropology University of Trieste, Department of Humanities	online
ITSL_01_04	SLOVENIA	expert	Professor of Geography University of Ljubljana, Department of Geography	online
ITSL_01_05	SLOVENIA	institution member	Employee Regional Development Centre Koper/Capodistria	online
ITSL_01_06	SLOVENIA	institution member	Employee Ministry of Cohesion and Regional Development, Division for the Management and Control of European Cohesion Policy and Recovery and Resilience Facility	online
ITSL_01_07	ITALY	association member	President of the Interregional Work Union Council Friuli-Venezia Giulia–Slovenia	in-person
ITSL_01_08	SLOVENIA	institution member	Director of the Isonzo–Soča Valley Development Centre	online
ITSL_01_09	SLOVENIA	association member	Director of the Walk of Peace foundation (Tolmin/Tolmino)	online
ITSL_01_10	ITALY	expert	Postdoctoral researcher University of Ljubljana, Department of Sociology	online
ITSL_01_11	ITALY	expert	Director Istituto di Sociologia Internazionale di Gorizia	online
ITSL_01_12	ITALY	institution member	Head of State Police (Trieste)	online

INTERVIEWS LEVEL 2 - LOCAL LEVEL				
code	country	category	role	modality
ITSL_02_01	ITALY	association member	Founder of the cultural association QuiAltrove (Gorizia)	in-person
ITSL_02_02	ITALY	institution member	Town Councillor for culture and cultural events, Municipality of Gorizia	in-person
ITSL_02_03	SLOVENIA	institution member	Mayor of the Municipality of Šempeter-Vrtojba	in-person
ITSL_02_04	SLOVENIA	association member	Co-founder of the cultural centre Carinarnica (Nova Gorica), editor of the magazine Razpotja	in-person
ITSL_02_05	SLOVENIA	institution member	Vice-director and employee of the European Groupment of Territorial Cooperation GO Gorizia–Nova Gorica–Šempeter-Vrtojba	in-person
ITSL_02_06	ITALY	institution member	Mayor of the Municipality of Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina	in-person
ITSL_02_07	SLOVENIA	association member	Project manager, PiNA association (Koper/Capodistria)	online
ITSL_02_08	SLOVENIA	institution member	Mayor of the Municipality of Nova Gorica	online
ITSL_02_09	SLOVENIA	institution member	Undersecretary to Development, Municipality of Nova Gorica	online
ITSL_02_10	ITALY	institution member	Director of Italian Red Cross of Gorizia	online



02

Synthetic Agenda

Synthetic Agenda

26/05/2024 | SUNDAY

GORIZIA (IT) and NOVA GORICA (SI)

Participation to two events of the History festival *èStoria*

Guided tour of Gorizia and Nova Gorica

27/05/2024 | MONDAY

GORIZIA (IT) and TRIESTE (IT)

City tour in Gorizia

Inauguration of the exhibition *In the garden of the (in)visible*
at the University of Trieste

28/05/2024 | TUESDAY

NOVA GORICA (SI) and GORIZIA (IT)

City tour in Nova Gorica

Interview with members of the Via del Borgo cluster (Gorizia)

Interview with Gorizia's Town Councillor for culture and cultural events

29/05/2024 | WEDNESDAY

ŠEMPETER-VRTOJBA (SI), NOVA GORICA (SI) and GORIZIA (IT)

Interview with the mayor of Šempeter-Vrtojba

Interview with the Director and Head of Programmes Carinarnica
hub of urban culture (Nova Gorica)

Interview with the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation GO Gorizia–
Nova Gorica–Šempeter-Vrtojba

Visit to the Museum of Smuggling (Nova Gorica)

30/05/2024 | THURSDAY

DUINO-AURISINA/DEVIN-NABREŽINA and TRIESTE (IT)

Interview with the Mayor of Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina (Carso–Kras
region)

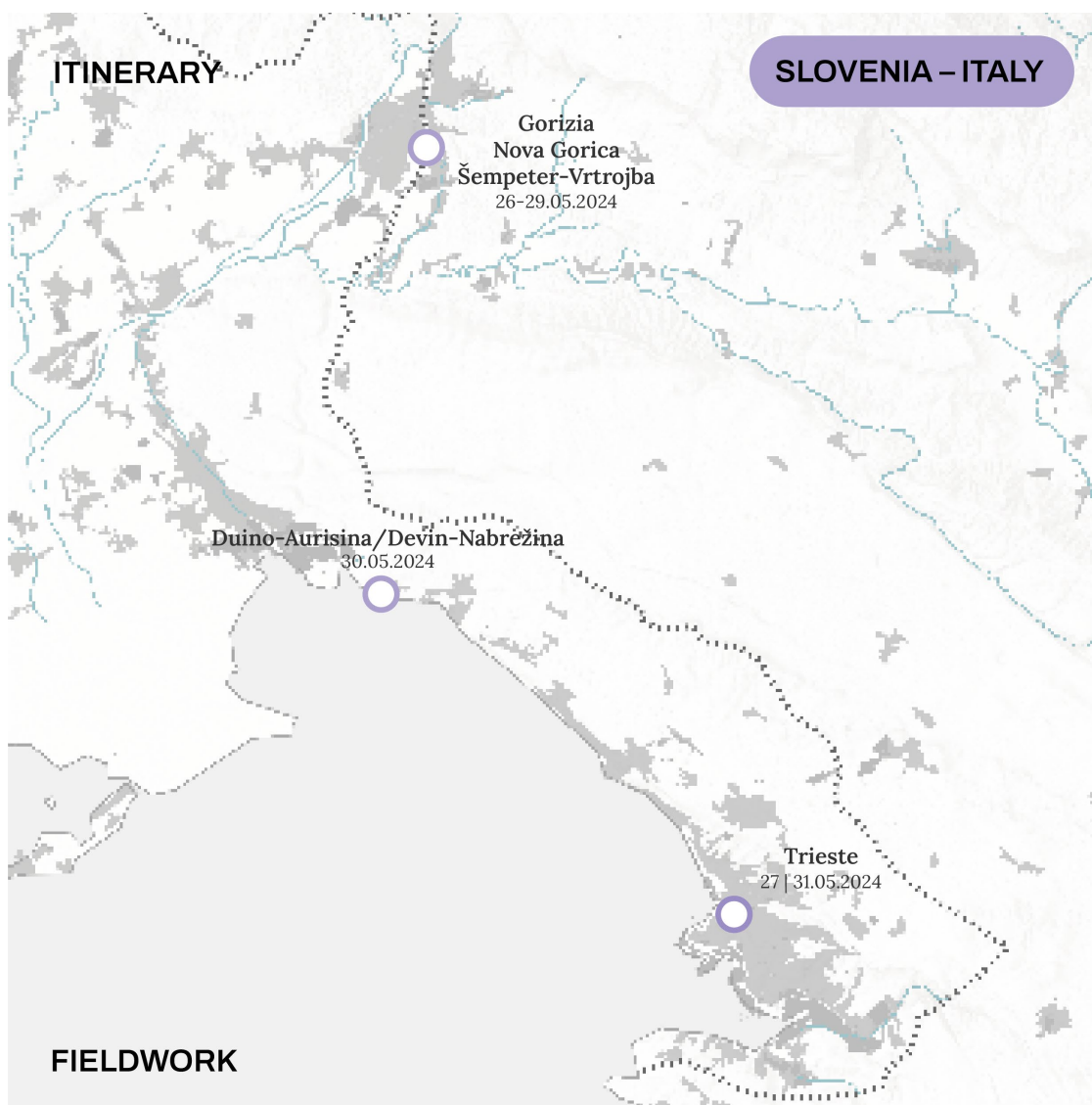
Interview with the President of the Interregional Work Union Friuli-
Venezia Giulia–Slovenia

31/05/2024 | FRIDAY

TRIESTE (IT)

Meeting with the Professor of Geography at the University of Trieste

Meeting with the President of the Local Action Group Carso–Kras





03

**Daily activities and
Documentation**

Sunday, 26th May 2024

GORIZIA (IT)

15.00 Guided tour of Gorizia and Nova Gorica led by the anthropologist Giustina Selvelli

17.30 Presentation of the book *Capire il confine. Gorizia e Nova Gorica: lo sguardo di un'antropologa indaga la frontiera*
By Giustina Selvelli

Notes

The first afternoon was dedicated to attending two events of the **History festival èStoria**, hosted every year in Gorizia. Both events revolved around the presentation of the book *Capire il confine. Gorizia e Nova Gorica: lo sguardo di un'antropologa indaga la frontiera* (transl. eng. *Understanding the border. Gorizia and Nova Gorica: the gaze of an anthropologist investigates the border*), by the anthropologist Giustina Selvelli (Bottega Errante Edizioni, Udine, 2024).

Festival èStoria website: [link](#).



Book
presentation
Festival
èStoria,
Gorizia.
(26.05.2024)

Guided tour of Gorizia and Nova Gorica

Time: 15.00

Location: Gorizia (IT) and Nova Gorica (SI)

Participation to a cross-border guided tour led by the anthropologist Giustina Selvelli

The tour was organised within the framework of the project *Piazza Novecento* organised by the association Bottega Errante. Giustina Selvelli, an Italo-Mexican anthropologist who grew up near Gorizia, guided us through a **cross-border itinerary** in the towns of Gorizia (IT) and Nova Gorica (SI). The tour combined historic information, with a focus on the 20th century, with Selvelli's **personal experiences of the border territory** to recount everyday life in a territory first divided by the Iron Curtain (1947-1991); then reunited by the progressive dismantlement of the physical and normative border initiated by the independence of Slovenia (1991) and its accession to the EU (2004) and Schengen Area (2007); and the more recent changes brought by the COVID-19 pandemic and the obtention of the 2025 European Capital of Culture title. Many of the participants, mostly inhabitants of Gorizia, enriched the discourse by recounting some of their personal anecdotes. The tour started in **Casa Rossa-Rožna Dolina**, which is historically the conurbation's main vehicular border crossing. From there we briefly entered Nova Gorica, stopping in front of its university, the 4th largest in Slovenia. A gas station and advertisements for the city's various casinos, both of which mostly cater for an Italian clientele, are located in the border crossing's vicinity. We then proceeded to the cyclo-pedestrian lane which runs parallel to the railway, completed recently thanks to Interreg funds, until reaching the cross-border square **Piazza Transalpina-Trg Evrope** and the Austro-Hungarian Transalpine railway station. This square has acted as seismograph of the area's recent history, as the most representative area of cross-border contact and stage to some of the area's most salient recent historical events. It was divided by the borderline fence from the 1947 to 2004 (Slovenia's entrance into the EU) and during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is currently being redeveloped as it will be one of the main stages of the events held in the framework of Nova Gorica-Gorizia title as European Capital of Culture 2025. The next stop was in front of **Gorizia's synagogue**: the city housed a vibrant Jewish community until WWII, when most of its population was deported. The tour ended in **Piazza della Vittoria/Travnik**, the heart of Gorizia's historic centre, dominated by the Baroque Saint Ignazio church and the Prefecture building. The latter housed the successive Fascist, Nazi and Yugoslav administrations during WWII, and the Allied Military Government administration from 1945 to 1947, when the new border between Italy and Yugoslavia was being decided.

Book presentation *Capire il Confine*

Time: 17.30

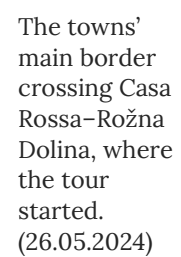
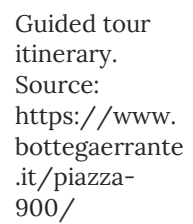
Location: Mediateca Ugo Casiraghi, Gorizia (IT)

Presentation of the book *Capire il confine. Gorizia e Nova Gorica: lo sguardo di un'antropologa indaga la frontiera* by Giustina Selvelli

Giustina Selvelli and Martina Napolitano presented Selvelli's book, an anthropologic and autobiographic analysis of life in the cross-border Gorizia region. Guided by Selvelli's experiences of the border first as an inhabitant, then as an anthropologist, the book delves into the socio-cultural, identity and spatial effects of the successive **re-bordering and de-bordering processes** the territory has witnessed since the 20th century. The book condemns the limitations and nationalistic derives of the City-State notion, inviting instead to cultivate a **rhizomatic, plural identity**, for which border regions provide a fertile terrain.

Thematic focus: The formation of a cross-border conurbation

The current conformation of the Gorizia–Nova Gorica–Šempeter–Vrtojba cross-border conurbation can be directly linked to the post-WWII 1947 border demarcation, which assigns the prevalently Italian-speaking cities of the Giulian Venetia region, including Gorizia, to the West (Italy), and the prevalently Slavic-speaking rural areas to the East, (Yugoslavia). The partition is particularly invalidating in the Gorizian territory, as the border cuts through parts of the urbanised area, dividing private properties, families and ecologies. Deeply rooted functional, economic and socio-cultural ties were thus artificially severed, as cross-border movement was mostly prohibited until 1955. The foundation of Nova Gorica in 1948 directly adjacent to the 'old' Gorizia constitutes the Yugoslav response to this territorial division. Šempeter/San Pietro and Vrtojba/Vertoiba were part of the Nova Gorica Municipality until 1999, when they were established as a separate municipality.





The Piazza Transalpina– Trg Evrope and the Transalpine railway station, currently under works in view of Nova Gorica– Gorizia's joint title as European Capital of Culture 2025. (26.05.2024)



After half a century of border fences and military surveillance, border stones have become domestic objects incorporated in the everyday landscape. (26.05.2024)

Monday, 27th May 2024

GORIZIA (IT) and TRIESTE (IT)

09.00 Visit to Gorizia's historic centre and Castle

17.00 Inauguration of the exhibition *In the garden of the (in)visible* at the University of Trieste, Trieste

17.30 Seminar *Borders of research and research of the border. Between Europe and Africa*



Exhibition *In the garden of the (in)visible*. (University of Trieste, 27.05.2024)

Visit to Gorizia's historic centre and Castle

Time: 09.00

Location: Gorizia (IT)

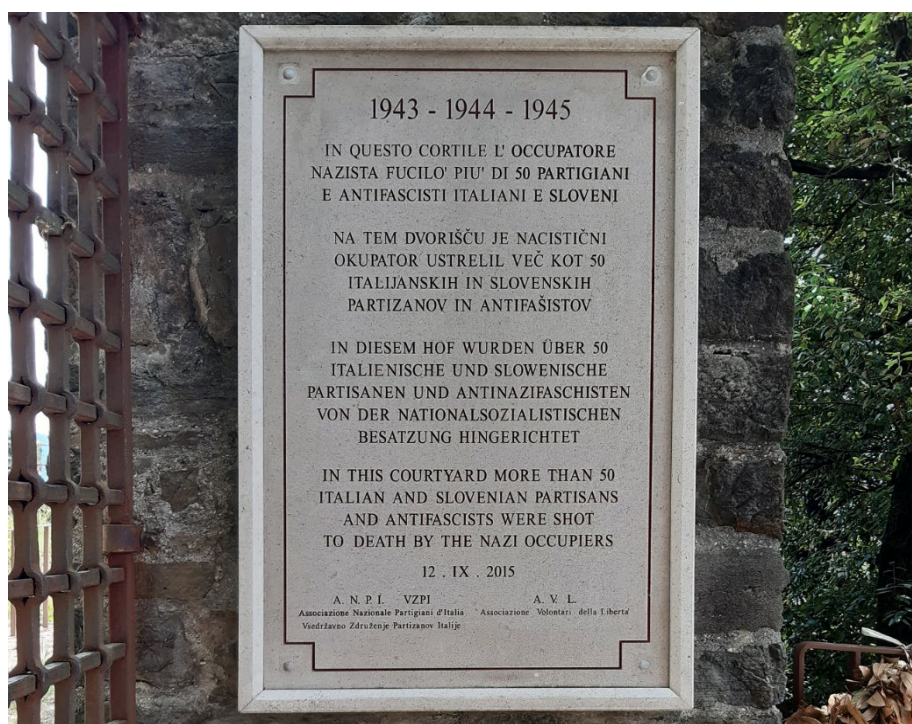
Gorizia's birth and development is linked to its strategic geopolitical position as a commercial and cultural crossroads between the Roman, German and Slavic worlds, and as such it witnessed several dominions. Its golden period coincides with the end of the 19th-beginning of the 20th century, under the Austro-Hungarian rule, when it becomes a touristic destination advertised as the '**Austrian Nice**' due to its mild weather and elegant buildings.

Today, the border area is undergoing demographic shrinkage and economic stagnation, as born witness by the number of closed shops and apartments for sale in Gorizia's historic centre.

Gorizia's Castle, which dates from the 11th century, is located on a hill which overlooks both sides of the conurbation. Because of its symbolic value, several memorials celebrating Italian soldiers who fought in WWI and WWII are located in the Castle's vicinity. In a context where for most of the 20th century identities and discourses were shaped in contraposition with the other side of the border, **multilingual plaques** commemorating the shared history and struggles of the border communities are rare. One of them, celebrating resistance against the Nazi administration (1943-45) is located in the castle's garden.



Gorizia's historic centre seen from the Castle's hill. Both cities have maintained a high proportion of green and agricultural space. (27.05.2024)



Plaque commemorating the execution of partisans under the Nazi occupation (1943-45). (27.05.2024)

**Inauguration of the exhibition *In the garden of the (in)visible*
Seminar *Borders of research and research of the border.*
*Between Europe and Africa***

Time: 17.00

Location: University of Trieste, Trieste (IT)

Participation to the exhibition's inauguration and seminar

The exhibition is the outcome of a cross-border research project led by anthropology students of the Universities of Trieste (IT) and Koper/Capodistria (SI) under the guidance of Professors Roberta Altin and Katja Hrobat Virloget. Students and professors travelled along the **Italo-Slovenian border** in the Trieste region, gathering and selecting **objects** that had been **abandoned by migrants** before crossing the border. The itinerant exhibition is co-designed by students and professors.

The exhibition provides the occasion for students and inhabitants of the border region to encounter, though indirectly, the migrants which traverse it, reflecting on the **(in)visibilization of migrants** and the meaning of the exhibited objects.

Exhibition: [link](#)

Thematic focus: Migration in the Italo-Slovenian border

Due to the proximity to the Croatian border and the fact that the border mostly runs through densely forested and little patrolled areas, the southern part of the Italo-Slovenian border is one of the main points of passage of the **Balkan migratory route**. Trieste and Gorizia are the two main poles of transit. In Trieste, the NGO International Rescue Committee assisted **16,052 migrants** in **2023**. The route has known two peaks in the past decade: during the 2015 'migratory crisis' and in 2021, following the intensification of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict. In October 2023, the Italian government decided to **suspend the Schengen Agreement**, reinstating border controls along this border. The suspension has been prolonged until the end of 2024.

Tuesday, 28th May 2024

NOVA GORICA (SI) AND GORIZIA (IT)

09.00 City tour in Nova Gorica

11.00 Informal conversations with the Confcommercio Gorizia's InfoPoint and the association Casa Netural

15.00 Interview with the founder of the cultural association QuiAltrove

16.40 Interview with Gorizia's Town Councillor for culture and cultural events



The numerous shops either closed or on sale in Gorizia's historic centre betray the city's economic and demographic crisis. (via Rastello, 28.05.2024)

City tour in Nova Gorica

Time: 09.00

Location: Nova Gorica (SI)

Following the 1947 delimitation of the border which sees Gorizia assigned to Italy, the Yugoslavian government decides to **build a city ex novo**, to compensate for the 'lost' Gorizia: Nova Gorica. The city, whose masterplan is designed by Edvard Ravnikar on the model of a modern Corbusian garden city, is meant to be the built manifesto of the Yugoslavian socialist regime. Due to shortage in funds and changed political priorities, construction soon departs from the masterplans blueprint. Nonetheless, the Modernist imprint is still clearly recognisable.

Nova Gorica's town centre is easily reachable through **Erjavčeva ulica**, one of the city's main axes which connects the San Gabriele–Erjavčeva border crossing to the city's main square Trg Edvarda Kardelja/Travnik. The avenue is bordered with large trees and busts of illustrious Goričans, known as *alejo zaslužnih žena in mož* (transl. eng. alley of meritorious men and women).

Trg Edvarda Kardelja/Travnik is formed by an ample green field dominated by the *Mlaj*, the 1st of May tree, around which the city's main public buildings are disposed, namely the City Council, the National Theatre and the Public Library. The square is known locally as *travnik* (roughly transl. eng. field), which not coincidentally is the historic name of Gorizia's Piazza della Vittoria/Travnik.

Several banners celebrating the two cities' title as European Capital of Culture 2025 decorated the city centre stating the event-driven rebranded identity 'GO!Borderless'.



Erjavčeva ulica
is one of Nova
Gorica's main
axis.
(28.05.2024)



Nova Gorica's
City Council,
on Trg
Edvarda
Kardelja/Trav
nik.
(28.05.2024)

Interviews with members of the Via del Borgo cluster

Time: 11.00; 15:00

Location: via Rastello, Gorizia (IT)

Discussing the Via del Borgo cluster's aims for the revitalization of Gorizia's historic centre and its wider territory in a cross-border perspective

The Via del Borgo cluster: an overview

The **Via del Borgo** cluster was founded in 2023 within the framework of the Bando Borghi scheme, a branch of the NRRP programme aimed at the revitalization of historic towns. The intent of the cluster is to **revitalize** via Rastello, one of the main streets of Gorizia's historic centre, by creating new socio-cultural and entrepreneurial activities in otherwise disused spaces. In a context marked by **demographic shrinkage and economic decline**, this **bottom-up initiative** brings a needed burst of innovation and entrepreneurship, with a keen interest on creating cross-border synergies. The various spaces forming the cluster were inaugurated shortly before our fieldtrip, the 8th May 2024.

The cluster is composed of six entities, the first three of which were interviewed:

- Confcommercio Gorizia's InfoPoint;
- Casa Netural, a co-living, co-working space, which also promotes projects for the valorisation of the (cross-border) territory;
- the Circle_Concept Zone, a cross-border contemporary art exhibition space curated by the association QuiAltrove;
- the social consortium il Mosaico, active in the wider Gorizia and Udine regions;
- a gastronomic boutique;
- an arts and handicrafts boutique.

Interview notes: A local revitalization with a cross-border breadth

- First-person wish of the interviewees to actively contribute to counter the city's economic decline and the perceived sense of generalised inertia.
- Shared knowledge that a **cross-border perspective and synergies** are essential to spark an effective revitalization process, considering the major demographic and entrepreneurial dynamism of the Slovenian side of the border, and the more intangible wish to foster **economic and ideational integration**.

Interview with Gorizia's Town Councillor for culture and cultural events

Time: 16.40

Location: Palazzo de Grazia, Gorizia (IT)

Discussing the preparation for the European Capital of Culture year and its legacy, and the future vision for the territory

- The **continuation of cross-border cooperation** during the **COVID-19 pandemic**, in particular the image of the mayors of Gorizia and Nova Gorica seating down to work together on opposite sides of the fence in Piazza Transalpina-Trg Evrope, was one of the elements which contributed to the municipalities' joint nomination as European Capital of Culture 2025. The pandemic and its traumatic impact on the local population once again divided by a temporary yet tangible border, is identified as the most relevant recent crisis for the territory.
- The intended **legacy** of GO!2025 is to develop **long-term cross-border strategic and spatial planning**, incentivise investments to re-activate the local economy, and increase the involvement of young people.
- Local municipalities, generally small and peripheral, are taking advantage of the capacity of cross-border endeavours to attract recognition and funds at the European and international level. This is the case of the Brda-Collio-Cuei vineyard area's cross-border **UNESCO World Heritage List application**.

Thematic focus: Nova Gorica–Gorizia European Capital of Culture 2025 GO! 2025

The municipalities of Nova Gorica and Gorizia, assisted by the EGTC GO, presented a joint BID Book to the 2025 European Capital of Culture. They were awarded the title, together with the German city of Chemnitz, in December 2020, just before of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under the slogan GO! Borderless, the event's BID book and communication are centred on celebrating the transcendence of borders, with a strong narrative focus on the concept of a united cross-border conurbation. A needed vision in a territory still characterised by the permanence of strong nationalistic narratives.



Both municipalities are eagerly waiting for the European Capital of Culture 2025 inauguration, on the 8th of February 2025. (Gorizia, 26.05.2024)



Participative mapping, founder of the cultural association QuiAltrove. (28.05.2024)

Wednesday, 29th May 2024

**ŠEMPETER-VRTROJBA (SI), NOVA GORICA (SI) and
GORIZIA (IT)**

10.00 Interview with the Mayor of Šempeter-Vrtojba

12.00 Interview with the Director and Head of programs of Carinarnica
hub of urban culture (Nova Gorica)

14.00 Interview with the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation GO
(Gorizia)

17.00 Visit to the Pristava Collection Museum's permanent exhibition
on cross-border smuggling (Nova Gorica)



The
Carinarnica
hub of urban
culture,
housed in the
former via San
Gabriele–
Erjavčeva ulica
checkpoint.
(28.05.2024)

Interview with the Mayor of Šempeter-Vrtojba

Time: 10.00

Location: Šempeter-Vrtojba (SI)

Discuss cross-border cooperation and responses to the polycrisis

- The mayor considers the **EGTC GO** as first and foremost a tool to **build trust** between the three participating municipalities and their inhabitants, and to provide a **robust basis and know-how** for cross-municipal and cross-border collaboration;
- The mayor underlines the **permanence of the border in the ideational dimension** and discourse and points out that a conscious **effort to ‘feel at home’** on the other side of the border is necessary to lessen this;
- The mayor identifies **demographic shrinkage** as the most relevant polycrisis for the territory he administers and underlines the importance of investing in welfare for young and elderly people as a response thereto.

Thematic focus: The European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation GO

The **EGTC GO** was instituted in 2011 by the municipalities of **Gorizia, Nova Gorica** and **Šempeter-Vrtojba** with the aim of providing a continuity and legal robustness in the development and implementation of cross-border cooperation projects and promoting a shared vision and planning of the territory. Its main fields of action have been implementing **cross-border health services** and **soft mobility network**, including the construction of a cycle-pedestrian bridge over the Isonzo–Soča river, and assistance in the preparation for the European Capital of Culture 2025. It is considered a best-case practice for its innovative use of EU financing tools and coping with normative differences.

Interview with the Director and Head of programs of Carinarnica hub of urban culture

Time: 12.00

Location: Nova Gorica (SI)

Discuss the hub's main projects and visions for the cross-border territory

Carinarnica: an overview

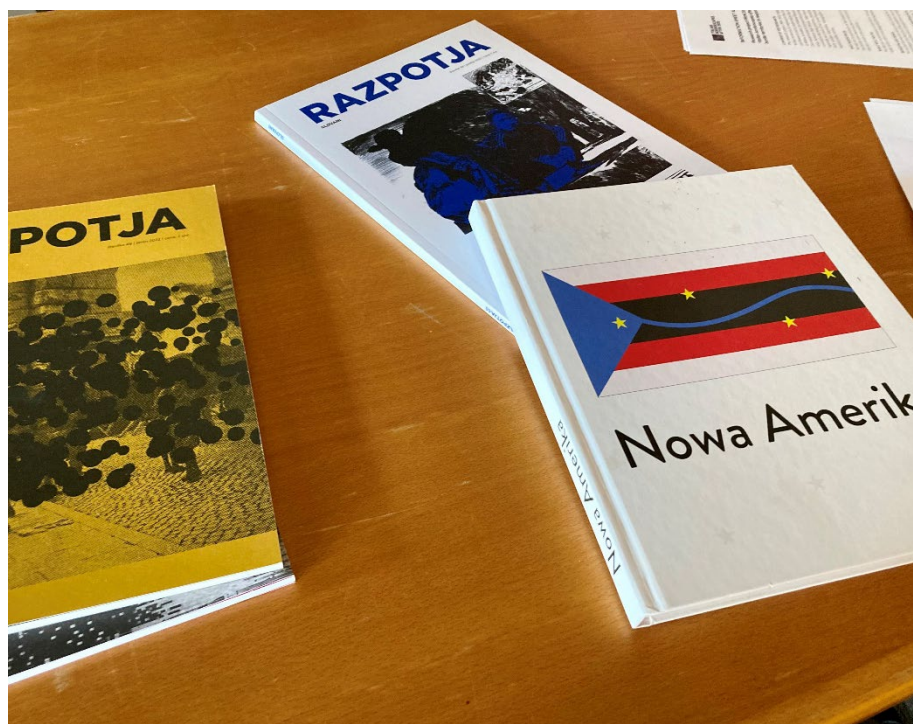
Carinarnica (transl. eng. custom house) is a cultural centre housed in the former via San Gabriele–Erjavčeva ulica checkpoint, founded by five local cultural associations who fought to save from demolition and **re-signify** this highly symbolic space as a space of **cross-border intellectual and physical encounter**. The symbolic foundational act of Carinarnica took place the night of Slovenia's entry into the Schengen Area, the 20th Decembre 2007, when the artist Anja Medved set up inside the checkpoint an impromptu 'confessionary', filming local inhabitants as they confessed their smuggling activities. These were later condensed in the documentary *Smuggler's Confessional. Views through the Iron Curtain* (Kinoatelj, 2010).

The space is the neuralgic centre of a variety of **cross-border and border-oriented cultural activities**, ranging from art residencies and exhibitions, to the literary festival *Mesto knjige* (transl. eng. *The City of Book*), to various music events and festivals.

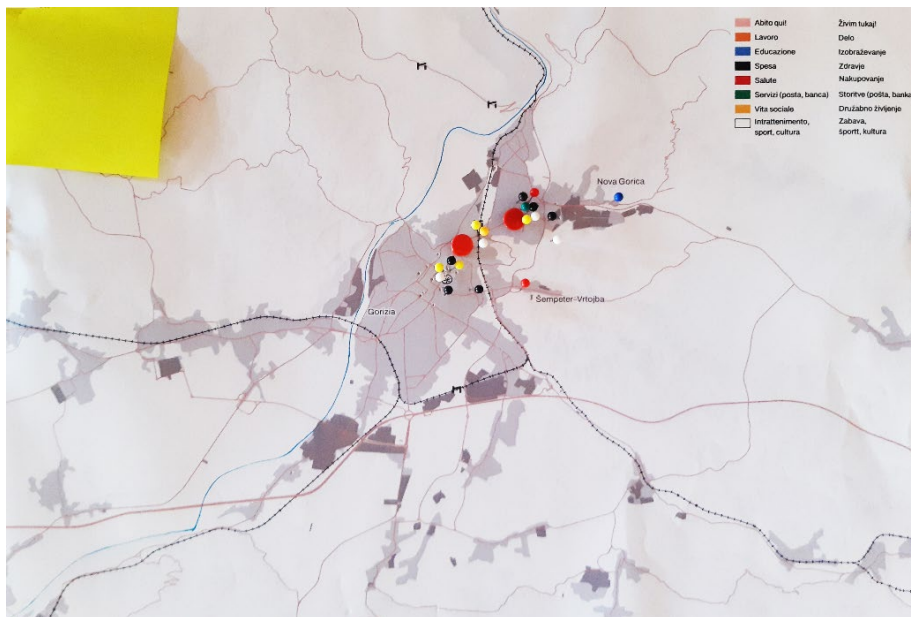
Interview notes

- The current **narration of 'cross-border conurbation'** proposed by the local institutions is in part a **response to the loss of geopolitical and ideational importance** entailed by the increased permeability of the border. Indeed, the fall of the Iron Curtain and the later integration of Slovenia in the EU and Schengen Area entailed **an ideational re-framing** for two communities which had largely constructed their identity and self-narration in opposition to each other and as 'bastions' of their respective socio-political models. The permeabilization of the border also entailed the **fall of the border economy**, which overlapped with the 2008 global economic crisis and the consequent decrease of the **gambling economy**, which constitutes one of Nova Gorica's main economic sources. These combined crises brought a period of **economic and demographic stagnation** from which the region is now trying to bounce back;

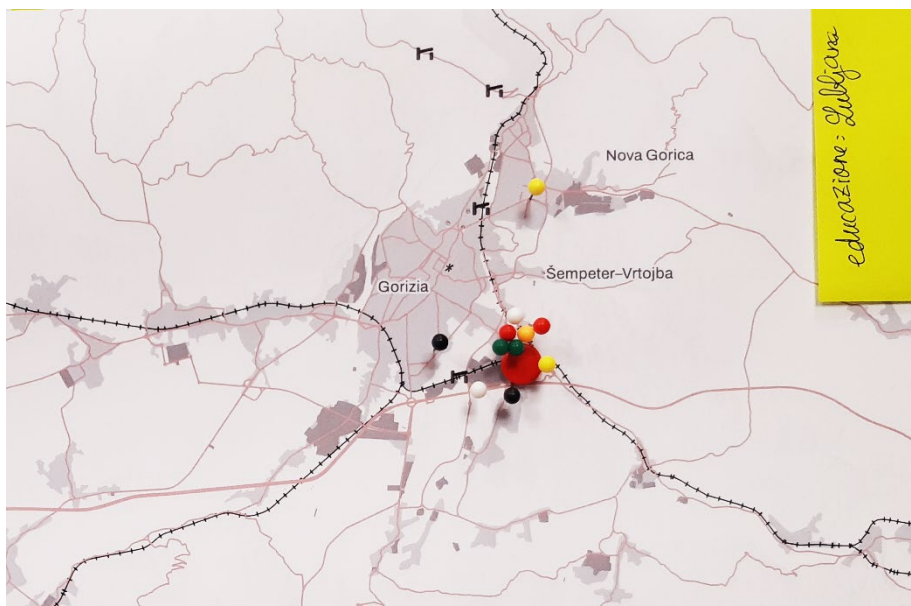
- Overview of the Carinarnica's vast body of cultural activities. These are designed also with the explicit aim to encourage local inhabitants to cross the border;
- **Metaphor of border spaces as 'adaptors'**: spaces of **plural**, 'European' identities which resist monolithic definitions of the Nation-State; 'uncharted' spaces where **innovative** forms of cross-border co-habitation and cooperation are devised; privileged territories to **re-think** a more cohesive, solidary and locally-rooted European Union. The *Transbordering laboratory* project was created together with other European border 'twin' cities, with the intent of concretizing this metaphor, and creating a body of **transferable know-how**.



Editorial products proposing alternative visions of border territories. (29.05.2024)



Participative mapping,
Director and
Head of
programs of
Carinarnica
hub of urban
culture.
(29.05.2024)



Participative
mapping,
Mayor of
Šempeter-
Vrtojba.
(29.05.2024)

Interview with the European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation GO

Time: 14.00

Location: Gorizia (IT)

Interviewees: Vice-director and administrative employee

Discuss the EGTC's role in facilitating cross-border cooperation and its role in the preparation of the European Capital of Culture and its legacy

- EGTC acts as an **intermediary and mediator** between the different municipalities, with the aim of building trust; facilitating cooperation by minimising cultural and normative barriers; maximising the use of European tools and funds; and promoting a **shared vision and planning** of the territory, notably by implementing shared public services;
- In addition to the substantial **normative barriers**, the interviewees also underlined how **language and mentality** constitute non negligible barriers to cross-border cooperation: while most Slovenians having grown up in the border region during the Iron Curtain period speak Italian fluently, the same cannot be said of their Italian counterparts, most of which lack even a passive knowledge of Slovenian. The absence of a normative protecting and framing **cross-border workers** is also indicated as particularly problematic and impacting;
- The economic and demographic crises are identified as the most relevant for the territory. The crises brought by the fall of the border economy is in part imputable to the **lack of preparation of local administrations** which, despite the ample forewarning, did not invest early enough in the development of alternative economic sources. This crisis is concatenated with the **demographic shrinkage** and **brain drain** the region is undergoing, only in part counterbalanced by the recent rise of smart working. The **decrease of border permeability** induced first by the COVID-19 pandemic and then by the suspension of the Schengen Agreement are also described as **deeply traumatic**, stirring feelings of anger and incomprehension in the local communities;
- A suggested response to these crises would be to further invest into the **university** sector, present on both sides of the border; and to capitalize on the elevated quality of life that the region offers;
- Beyond the creation of infrastructures (mostly transport and hospitality sectors), the **legacy of the ECoC** is mostly intangible: the creation of a cross-border cultural district, the **national and international recognition**, the strengthening of cross-border collaboration and development of a shared know-how.

Visit to the Pristava Collection Museum's permanent exhibition on cross-border smuggling

Time: 17.00

Location: Rafut–Pristava former border crossing checkpoint, Nova Gorizia (SI)

The museums on the Gorizian border: an overview

Since the turn of the century, a very interesting approach to the musealization of the border has burgeoned on both sides. Indeed, the Slovenian Regional Museum Goriški muzej has opted to create a Museum on the Border divided in four small, but highly symbolic spaces located on or near by the border:

- The Kolodvor Collection Museum is located in the Transalpine railway station and houses the permanent exhibition **State Border in the Goriška Region 1945–2004**;
- The Pristava Collection Museum is located in the Rafut–Pristava former border checkpoint and houses the permanent exhibition **Na šverc! Smuggling in the Goriška Region after World War II**;
- the Military Watchtower in Vrtojba houses an exhibition on life in a territory divided by the Iron Curtain;
- The Miren Collection Museum is located in the cemetery building in Miren and houses the exhibition **Remember Me** which focuses on people who crossed the border in both directions.

In a wish to create a concrete and metaphoric dialogue, the municipality of Gorizia has reconverted its former Rafut–Pristava checkpoint into the **Lasciapassare/Prepusnica museum** (a permit which granted border crossing to inhabitants within a 10km range from the border following the 1955 Udine Agreements). The museum hence faces the Pristava Collection Museum across the border and is centred on memories of the border communities during and after the Iron Curtain.

Pristava Collection Museum

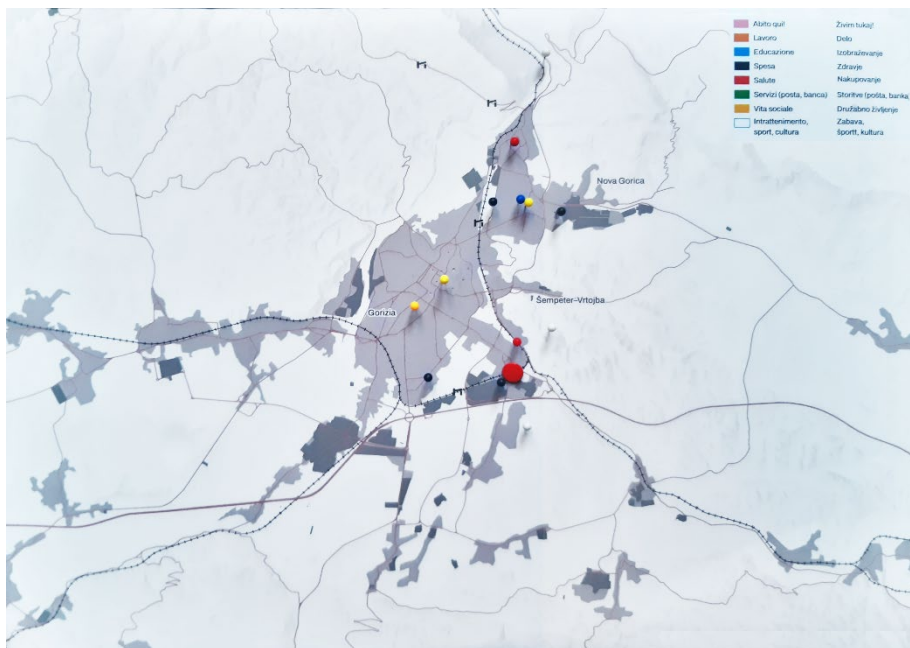
Because of the limited opening hours and dense schedule, we only had the opportunity to visit the Pristava Collection Museum. Smuggling was a common practice during the Iron Curtain period, especially from the 60s onwards, with the increase of Slovenians' purchasing power. The small museum presents interviews gathering recollection of local inhabitants and border guards, and examples of the goods being smuggled. It also contains a re-creation of an interrogatory room, centring on the feeling of fear instigated by border controls.



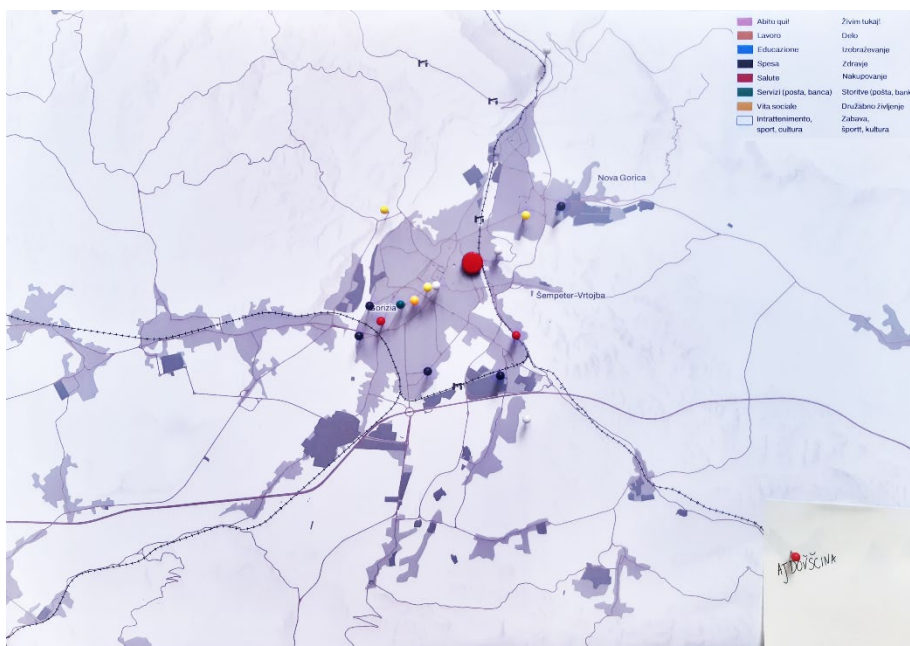
GO!2025
leaflets and
merchandising.
The turquoise
colour recalls
that of the
cross-border
river Isonzo-
Soča.
(29.05.2024)



Recreation of
the
interrogation
room at the
Pristava
Collection
Museum,
with the
portrait of Tito
hung on the
wall.
(29.05.2024)



Participative mapping,
Vice-director
EGTC GO.
(29.05.2024)



Participative mapping,
administrative
employee
EGTC GO.
(29.05.2024)

Thursday, 30th May 2024

DUINO-AURISINA/DEVIN-NABREŽINA and TRIESTE (IT)

10.00 Interview with the mayor of Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina

15.00 Interview with the President of the Interregional Work Union Friuli-Venezia Giulia–Slovenia



The twin commemorative plaques at the entrance of the Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina City Hall, a bi-lingual municipality. (30.05.2024)



A commemorative plaque celebrating cross-border workers installed by the CSI/MSS FVG–SLO at the Transalpine station. (27.05.2024)

Interview with the mayor of Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina

Time: 10.00

Location: Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina (IT)

Discuss cross-border cooperation and responses to the polycrisis

- The municipality of Duino-Aurisina/Devin-Nabrežina was one of the main territories where the **Istrian-Dalmatian refugees** were re-located following the post-WWII territorial partition, in towns built by the Italian government near the border, in a region predominantly inhabited by the Slovene minority. This **forced co-habitation**, during a period overshadowed by ethnic-based violences, created tensions which perdured in the following decades. In this context, the election of the current mayor, who is part of the Slovene minority and a strong advocate of its safeguard, is a positive sign of integration;
- Normative differences is identified as the main obstacle to cross-border cooperation, followed by linguistic barriers;
- The municipality was one of the most severely hit by the **2022 Karst wildfires**. The episode clearly showed the **shortcomings of the prevention and response systems**, at the national and cross-border levels. The silver lining is that the immediate and long-term responses have been characterised by **cross-border solidarity and cooperation**. Two ongoing Interreg programmes are centred on building a cross-border monitoring, alarm and response network and the development of a more efficient water collection and management system. At the municipal level the **re-development of the agricultural sector** is being incentivised as a mean to control and maintain the territory;
- The crisis deemed most relevant for the territory is **demographic shrinkage**, which has conspicuously accelerated since the turn of the century;
- The wish for the region's future is to revive its role as geographic and cultural crossroad, to enhance its touristic sector by capitalising on its proximity to diverse natural and urban touristic destinations and developing a cohesive cross-border touristic offer and promotion. Another sector which would benefit from the development of cross-border synergy, is the ports of Trieste and Koper/Capodistria.

Thematic focus: Italian and Slovenian minorities in the border region

Because of the territorial decoupages and migrations which ensued the two World Wars, the Italo-Slovenian-Croatian border region houses important ethno-linguistic minorities. These were subject to appalling ethnic-based violences and discriminations during the 20th century, culminating before and during WWII. According to the Slovene Research Institute, the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region is home to ca. 43,400 Slovenian moth-tongues in 2020, predominantly inhabiting the rural areas along the border. The Slovene community has a strong tradition of socio-cultural activity, whose regional centres are the Slovene theatres and libraries in Trieste and Gorizia. The Italian minority is concentrated in the Slovene and Croatian Istria coastal area, mainly in the cities of Koper/Capodistria (SI), Pula/Pola and Rijeka/Fiume (HR). According to the 2002 census, the Italian moth-tongues in Slovenia were 3,762.

Interview with the President of the Interregional Work Union Friuli-Venezia Giulia–Slovenia

Time: 15.00

Location: Trieste (IT)

Discuss the characteristics of the cross-border work basin and the lack of normative safeguards

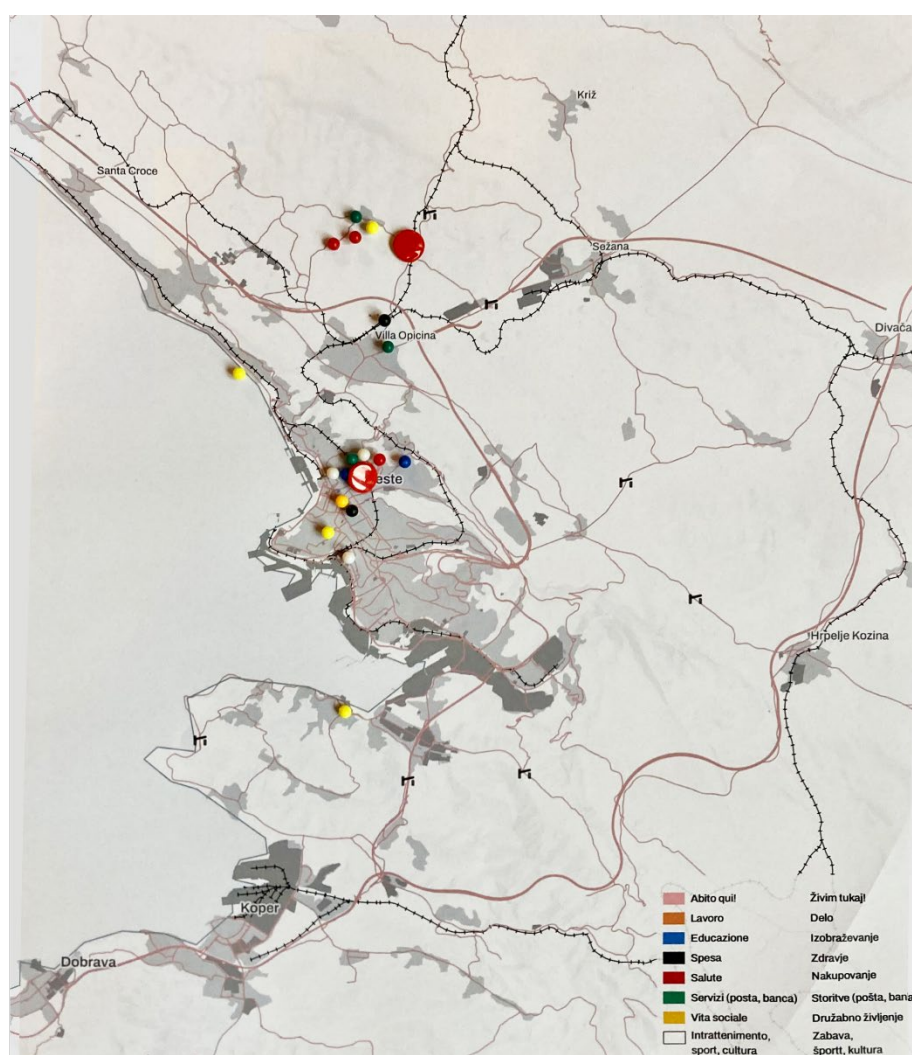
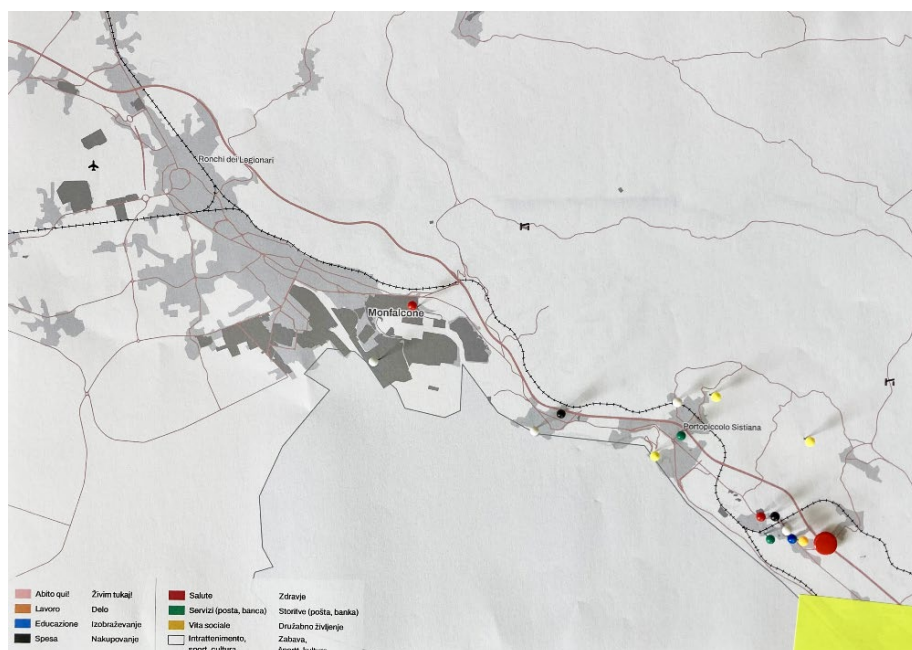
The Interregional Work Union Friuli-Venezia Giulia–Slovenia: an overview

Founded in 1994, the Interregional Work Union Friuli-Venezia Giulia–Slovenia (CSI/MSS FVG-SLO) aims to safeguard the rights of the cross-border workers and promote the socio-economic growth of the border area. It is part of the European Confederation of Work Unions.

Link: <https://www.csifvgslo.org/>

Interview notes

- The Italo-Slovenian-Croatian cross-border basin is constituted of an estimated **15,000 – 18,000 workers**, most of which commute towards Italy, though the past years are witnessing a progressive **inversion of trends**. A more precise number is not known since there are no official statistics compiled, and that a large part of the cross-border work is **undeclared**, especially in the care sector;
- The large share of undeclared work is in part imputable to the lack of normative which safeguards cross-border workers and grants them equal **access to welfare benefits**, ranging from maternity leaves, to vouchers for families with young children (transl. it. assegno unico). Despite what the president has described as a **lack of political wish** to change this situation, the CSI/MSS FVG-SLO has been instrumental in the development of cross-border agreements on pensions and, more recently, smart working;
- **Demographic shrinkage** and the **Trieste's inability to re-invent itself** and capitalize on its large research at higher education sector are identified as the most relevant crises for the Trieste region. These crises are aggravated by the lack of a cross-border projection and vision. The redevelopment of the **Old Port area** is indicated as a potential starting point to revitalize the local economy.



Friday, 31th May 2024

TRIESTE (IT)

10.00 Informal conversation with the Professor of Geography
at the University of Trieste, Trieste

15.00 Informal conversation with the President of the Local Action Group
Carso-Kras, Trieste



The Salone degli Incanti, expositive centre of Modern and contemporary art, formerly Trieste's central fishery. (31.05.2024)

Informal conversation with the Professor of Geography at the University of Trieste

Time: 10.00

Location: Trieste (IT)

Discuss recent socio-spatial developments in the Carso–Kras cross-border region

- While the coastal area of the Karst region has been largely incorporated in the Trieste and Monfalcone urban corridor, both urbanely and linguistically. The hinterland, on the other hand, has remained largely inhabited by the Slovene minority, very active in keeping alive its traditions and folklore. The recent trend of Italians moving to the Carso–Kras is met with some circumspection and resistance by the local inhabitants;

- Zoning plans have **proscribed the agricultural use** of large parts of the Italian Karst plateau. Though intended to protect the area's landscape, it has resulted in its **progressive abandonment**, lack of maintenance, and increase in aridity. Recently, younger generation has started to reappropriate itself of this territory, notably with the development of **agritourism sector**.

Informal conversation with the President of the Local Action Group Carso–Kras

Time: 15.00

Location: Trieste (IT)

Discuss the Local Actions Group's action, and the upcoming creation of a EGTC Carso–Kras

Overview: towards the creation of the EGTC Carso–Kras

Led by the **Local Action Group (LAG) Carso–Kras** on the Italian side, by the **Regional Development Agency (ORA) Krasa and Brkinov** on the Slovenian side, and supported by two successive Interreg programmes, the long political and normative path towards the creation of an EGTC in the Karst area should come to a successful conclusion by spring 2025, bringing together (at the time of writing) five Slovenian and twelve Italian municipalities. Its main aims will be **the joint management and touristic promotion** of the territory and of the cross-border **Carso–Kras geopark**, and the latter's inscription in the UNESCO Global Geoparks network.

Interview notes

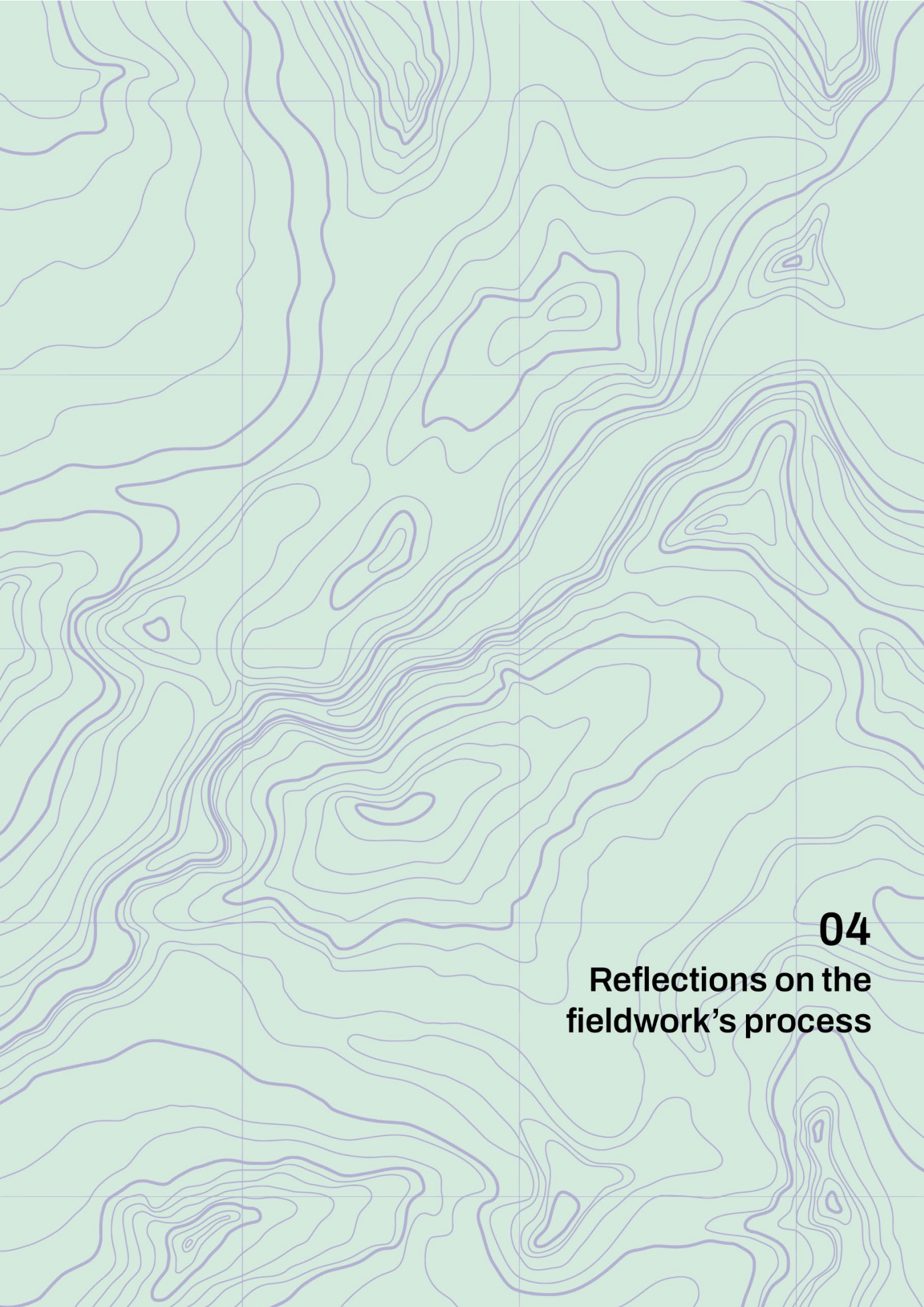
- Founded in 2008, the Local Action Group (LAG) Carso-Kras covers a territory which overlaps entirely or partially with 12 Italian municipalities of Karst area.
- The LAG works mainly as an interface between **local businesses** and institutions, facilitating dialogue, showcasing and promoting business' services and goods. The LAG also funds development projects and is responsible for developing and updating the **Local Development Strategy**. The aim is to develop a strong **entrepreneurial model** which unites the promotion of the territory and its culture with that of local food and beverage products;
- The **COVID-19 pandemic** had a devastating effect on small businesses. The LAG's response was the creation of the website trieste.green, an online showcase for Karstic products.



Local Action Group Carso-Kras's territorial area of competence. Source: <http://galcarso.eu/>



Participative mapping,
Professor of Geography
University of Trieste.
(31.05.2024)



04

**Reflections on the
fieldwork's process**

Transport

Though it made trips more time-consuming, carrying out the fieldwork relying solely on public transport was beneficial, as it enabled us to test first-hand local public transport networks. It must be underlined that we didn't use public transport to cross the border, which is acknowledgedly the main bottleneck for border inhabitants. Nonetheless, the lack of a car limited our movements to the city centres, precluding the possibility of visiting noteworthy sites located in the hinterland.

During the first part of the trip, which took place in the cross-border conurbation of Gorizia–Nova Gorica–Šempeter–Vrtojba, all trips were done on foot. This provided a good opportunity to get familiar with the cities and observe the unfolding of daily life.

Time constraints

Having chosen to visit several cities along the southern part of the Italo-Slovenian border, limited time was spent in each location. This limited opportunities for urban explorations, including visits to border-related landmarks and museums.

Language

Though none of the team members speak Slovenian, Italian is commonly spoken by residents of the border area which grew up during the Cold War period. This enabled to fluidify interactions.

Spontaneous interviews with local inhabitants

Due to time constraints and our lack of familiarity with the studied contexts, no spontaneous interviews were led. Nonetheless, participating to the guided tour of Gorizia and Nova Gorica led by the anthropologist Giustina Selvelli was a precious opportunity to listen to memories, anecdotes and points of view on the current situation of other participants to the tour, mainly local inhabitants.

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