

01.c

Fieldwork – Italo-French Border

15-19.07.2024

PRIN 2022 research project

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



01.c Fieldwork Report: Italo-French Border

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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-French border between July 15 and 19, 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 |
| ITFR_01_01 | FRANCE | expert | Former Associate Professor University Côte d'Azur Expert of the Italian- French Cross-Border Cooperation | online |
| ITFR_01_02 | ITALY | Regional politician | Councillor for European affairs, Innovation, and National Policies on Mountain of the Valle d'Aosta Region | online |
| ITFR_01_03 | FRANCE | expert | General Manager of the French National Cross-border Cooperation Association (MOT) | online |
| ITFR_01_04 | ITALY | institution member | Employee Liguria Region Directorate-General for Economic Development Interreg Manager | online |
| ITFR_01_05 | ITALY | institution member | Employee Piedmont Region Directorate for Coordination of European Policies and Funds European cross-border cooperation Unit | online |
| ITFR_01_06 | FRANCE | institution member | Director Manager of the ALCOTRA Programme Management Authority Auvergne Rhône Alpes Region | online |
| ITFR_01_07 | FRANCE | institution member | Employee Provence Alpes Côte-d'Azur Region Territorial Coordinator for the Italy-France Maritime Cross- Border Cooperation Program. | online |

| INTERVIEWS LEVEL 2 - LOCAL LEVEL | | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------|--------------------|---|-----------|
| code | country | category | role | modality |
| ITFR_02_01 | ITALY | Association Member | President of the Bardonecchia Modane Fournaux Twinning Association | In-person |
| ITFR_02_02 | ITALY | Association Member | Representant of the Italian Red Cross Committee of Susa | In-person |
| ITFR_02_03 | FRANCE | expert | Italian French cross-border Doctor | In-person |
| ITFR_02_04 | ITALY | institution member | Councilor for Cross-Border Relations at Bardonecchia Municipality | In-person |
| ITFR_02_05 | ITALY | Association Member | President of the Italian Alpine Club Association | In-person |
| ITFR_02_06 | FRANCE | expert | Italian-French cross-border Doctor at the Briançon Hospital | In-person |
| ITFR_02_07 | FRANCE | institution member | Mayor of Modane and Vice President of the Alte Valli – Hautes Vallées Conference | In-person |
| ITFR_02_08 | FRANCE | institution member | Head of the Crafts, Trade and Industry Unit Communauté de Communes Haute Maurienne Vanoise (CCHMV) | In-person |
| ITFR_02_09 | FRANCE | institution member | Croix Rouge Française-Modane association member | In-person |
| ITFR_02_10 | FRANCE | institution member | Mayor of the Municipality of Saint Jean de Maurienne | In-person |
| ITFR_02_11 | FRANCE | institution member | Territorial Development Division Manager at the Communauté de Communes Maurienne Galibier (CCMG) | In-person |
| ITFR_02_12 | ITALY | institution member | Mayor of the Municipality of Ferrera Moncenisio | online |
| ITFR_02_13 | ITALY | institution member | French teacher at the De Ambrois High-School in Oulx | online |
| ITFR_02_14 | ITALY | institution member | Italian representative of Fraternità Rifugio Massi Refugee | online |



02

Synthetic Agenda

Synthetic Agenda

15/07/2024 | MONDAY

BARDONECCHIA (IT) and MELEZET (IT)

Interview with the President of the Twinning Association Bardonecchia Modane-Fourneaux

City tour in Bardonecchia

Visit to the Olympic Village (Bardonecchia)

16/07/2024 | TUESDAY

OULX (IT), BRIANÇON (FR) and BARDONECCHIA (IT)

Interview with a member of the Italian Red Cross Association (Oulx)

Crossing the Montgenevre Pass

Visit the Italian-French cross-border Briançon Hospital Centre Hospitalier des Escartons

Interview with an Italian-French cross-border doctor (Briançon)

Interview with the Bardonecchia's Town Councillor for cross-border relations

Interview with the President of the Italian Alpine Club Association

Visit to the Rifugio Fraternità Massi in Oulx

17/07/2024 | WEDNESDAY

SUSA (IT), FERRARA MONCENISIO (IT), MONCENISIO (FR) and MODANE (FR)

Interview with Italian-French cross-border doctor in Susa

City tour in Susa

Crossing the State Road 25, the Napoleonic Road

Visit of the Eco- Museum Le Terre al Confine (Ferrera Moncenisio)

Crossing the Mont Cenis Pass

Crossing the Fréjus Pass

18/07/2024 | THURSDAY

MODANE (FR)

Interview with the mayor of Modane and Vice-President of Alte Valli Conference

Interview with an employee at the CCHMV, Artisans - Commerce - Industry Unit

Visit to the Esseillon forts (Modane)

Photographic tour Maurienne Vanoise Valley

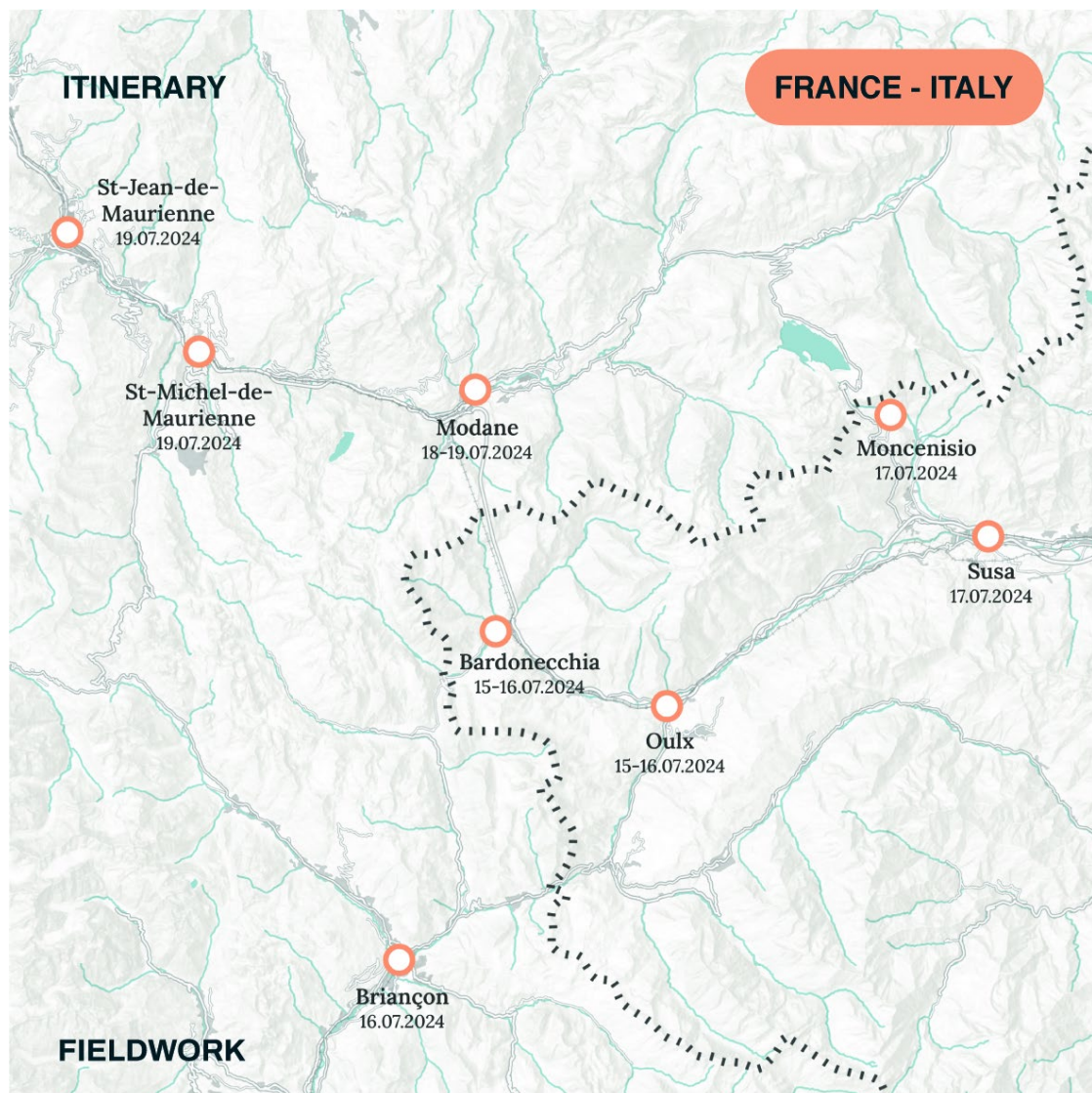
Visit to the Museobar the border Museum (Modane)

19/07/2024 | FRIDAY

MODANE, SAINT JEAN DE MAURIENNE and SAINT MICHEL DE MAURIENNE (FR)

Interview with a member of the French Red Cross Association (Modane)

Interview with the Mayor of Saint Jean de Maurienne (St. Jean de Maurienne)
Interview with an employee at the Territorial Development Division, CCMG
(St. Michel Maurienne)





03

**Daily activities and
Documentation**

Monday, 15th July 2024

MELEZET (IT)

BARDONECCHIA (IT)

16.00 Interview with the President of the Twinning Association Bardonecchia
Modane- Fourneaux in Melezet

18.00 City tour in Bardonecchia

18.00 Visit to the Olympic Village (Bardonecchia)

Notes

The first day of activities begins in the afternoon where we met the President of the Bardonecchia Modane-Fourneaux Twinning Association. The activities continued with a visit to the village of Bardonecchia.



Melezet, near
Bardonecchia.
(15.07.2024)

Interviews with the President Twinning Association Bardonecchia Modane-Fourneaux

Time: 16.00

Location: Melezet (IT)

The first afternoon was dedicated to interviewing the President of the Twinning Association Bardonecchia Modane- Fourneaux at the *Pian del Colle Golf Course* in Melezet. The golf course is located in the very last portion of Italian territory, few meters before the entrance in Vallée Étroite (Valle Stretta), France.

The twinning association mostly organises sports activities to involve inhabitants of two borders, such as the **Transalpine hike** whose first edition dates back to 1982. During the interview we perceived that this kind event is indeed one of the last remaining cross-border initiative involving citizens from both sides of the border.



Partecipative mapping of the President of the Bardonecchia Modane Fourneaux Twinning Association. (15.07.2024)

Tour of Bardonecchia

Time: from 18.00 to 19.00

Location: Borgo Vecchio, Borgo Nuovo and Villaggio Olimpico

The activity proceeded with a short tour of Bardonecchia which shows a pretty mountain little village that seems to have been unaffected by the economic crisis of the last few years. The town is located at the meeting point of four valleys (*Rochemolles, Frejus, Rho and Valle Stretta*) in a closed basin far from the major communication routes, which has made the town relatively independent. Until the mid-19th century, Bardonecchia was a small mountain village that lived of agriculture and cattle breeding; all the buildings were located near the parish of *Saint Ippolito Church* in the area of **Borgo Vecchio**.

The **Borgo Nuovo** neighbourhood was instead created for the housing of managers, workers and employees engaged in the construction of the **Fréjus tunnel (1857)** as well as for shops, schools and new related services.



Congress
Center,
Palazzo delle
Feste,
Bardonecchia.
(15.07.2024)

The massive sports facilities are a reminder of the **Turin 2006 Olympic Games** which was an **engine of development and international promotion**, especially for the Italian-French cross border co-operation.

During our visit to the Olympic Village sport areas, we had the opportunity to interact with the technical staff of the Italian Olympic national épée team, who were engaged in the preparation of young Italian epee fencers at the event of 'Schermafutura'. The Olympic National Epee team was instead in retreat in Bardonecchia just a couple of days before, taking advantage of the summer cool weather and in the run-up to Paris Olympic Games 2024. Although The Italian National team retreat took place in a border area, we noted that no contact was undertaken with French sports teams for any kind of exchanges.



Olympic
Village in
Bardonecchia.
(15.07.2024)

Tuesday, 16th July 2024

OULX (IT)

BRIANÇON (FR)

BARDONECCHIA (IT)

09.00 Interview with a member of the Italian Red Cross Association

11.30 Visit the Italian-French cross-border Briançon Hospital Centre Hospitalier des Escartons

12.30 Interview with an Italian-French cross-border doctor

15.00 Interview with the Bardonecchia's Town Councillor for cross-border relations

16.30 Interview with the President of the Italian Alpine Club Association

18.00 Visit to the "Rifugio Fraternità Massi" in Oulx

Notes

The second day of fieldwork was very intense and full of interesting meetings that highlighted the first relevant insights related to crisis management in cross-border healthcare and migration. After the first interview we set off for Briançon, driving along State Road 24 and crossing the Italo-French border for the first time through the Montgenevre Pass.



Italo-French
border at
Montgenevre.
(16.07.2024)



Centre Hospitalier des Escartons

Niveau 4

PEDIATRIE *Pediatria - Pediatrics*

Consultations - Hospitalisation - ➡ 400 à 414

MATERNITE *Maternita - Maternity*

Consultations sage-femmes - Gynécologie
Hospitalisation - ➡ 420 à 436

Niveau 3

CHIRURGIE *Chirurgia - Surgery*

Chirurgie hospitalisation - ➡ 312 à 352

Générale - Gynécologie - Ophtalmologie - ORL - IVG

Orthopédie - Stomatologie - Urologie - Viscérale

Chirurgie ambulatoire - ➡ 301 à 311

BLOC OPERATOIRE *Sala operatoria - Operating room*

Salle d'attente

Niveau 2

URGENCES *Pronto soccorso - Emergency*

REANIMATION *Reanimazione - Intensive Care Unit*

DIALYSE *Dialisi - Dialysis*

Niveau 1

MEDECINE *Medicina generale - General medicine*

Médecine hospitalisation - ➡ 114 à 152

Médecine polyvalente - Gastro-entérologie - Pneumo-cardiologie

Hôpital de jour ➡ 1 ➡ 2

Niveau 0

Consultations *Visite ambulatoriali - Consultation*

IMAGERIE *Radiologia / TAC - Medical imaging*

Radiologie - Scanner - Echographie

Vaccinations - CDAG - CIDDIST - UMSP

Assistants sociaux - Santé au travail - Addictologie

Niveau -1

PSYCHIATRIE *Psichiatria - Psychiatry*

Accès par l'extérieur en direction des URGENCES :

Laboratoire *Laboratorio - Laboratory*

EFS Don du sang - Administration

Healthcare
services at
Briançon
Hospital in
both Italian
and French
language.
(16.07.2024)

Tour of Briançon Hospital “*Centre Hospitalier des Escartons*”

Time: 11:30

Location: Briançon (FR)

At the Briançon hospital we had the opportunity to meet an Italian doctor who guided us in a tour of the Hospital's departments and showed us the state-of-the-art healthcare services. About a quarter doctors in Briançon are Italian. Many of them chose Briançon Hospital for **better career opportunities** and **faster recruitment procedures**. Many patients come from the Susa Valley and Piedmont for better healthcare services, i.e. short waiting list or geographical proximity. However, health care has become more complicated for Italian patients in France. Without an agreement with France at government level, except for emergencies,

Merci de bien vouloir préparer :

- Document d'identité (Pas de permis de conduire)

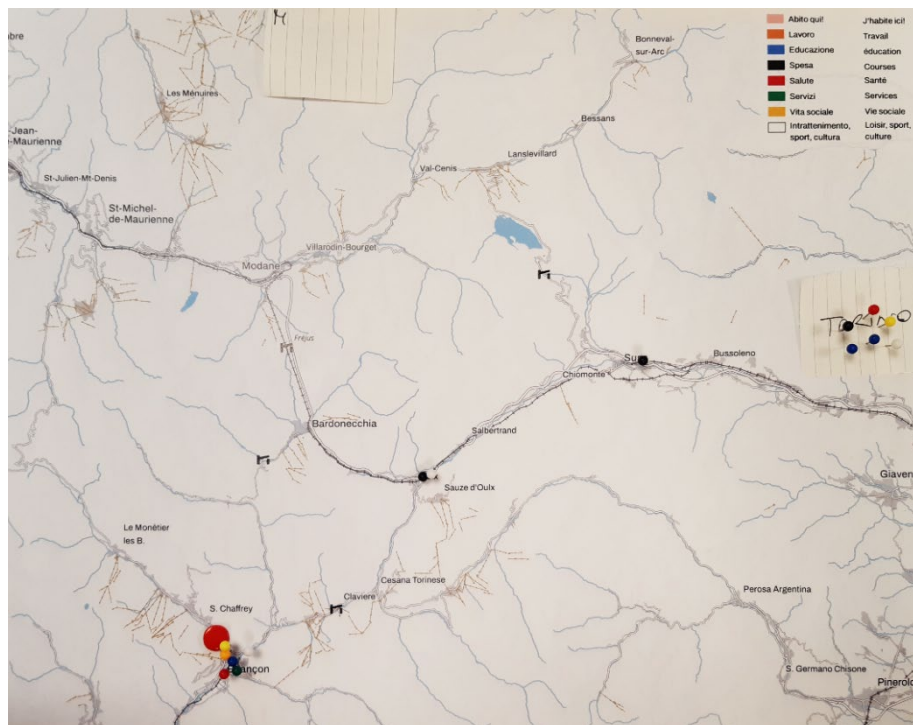
- Carte vitale

- Mutuelle
- Livret de famille + document d'identité du parent accompagnant (mineur)
- Accident de travail
- Tessera sanitaria
- Carta d'identità

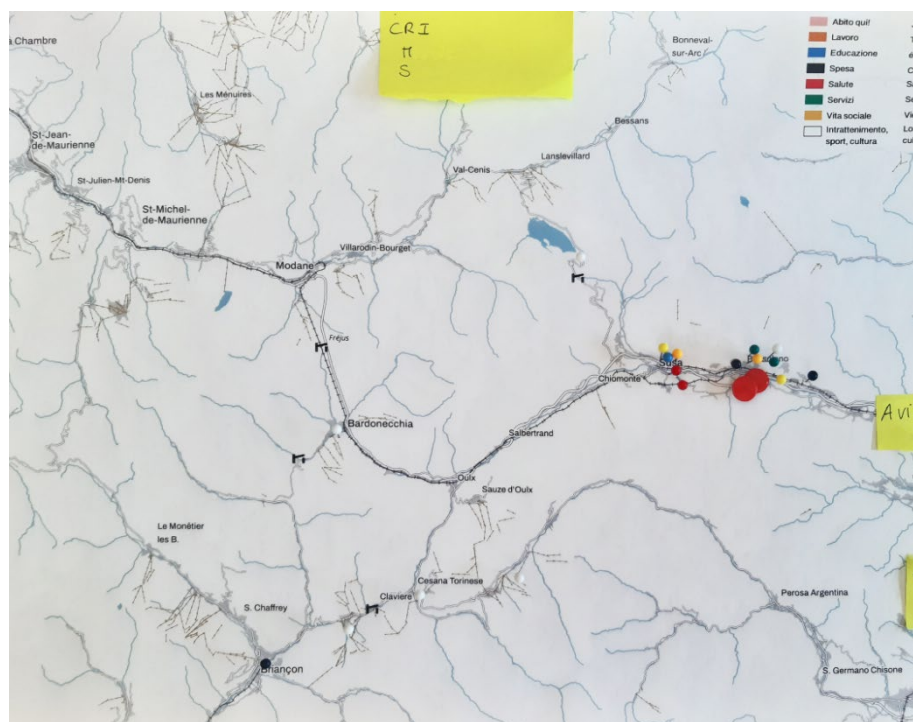


Information sheet for Italian and French patients at the registration desk at Briançon Hospital. (16.07.2024)

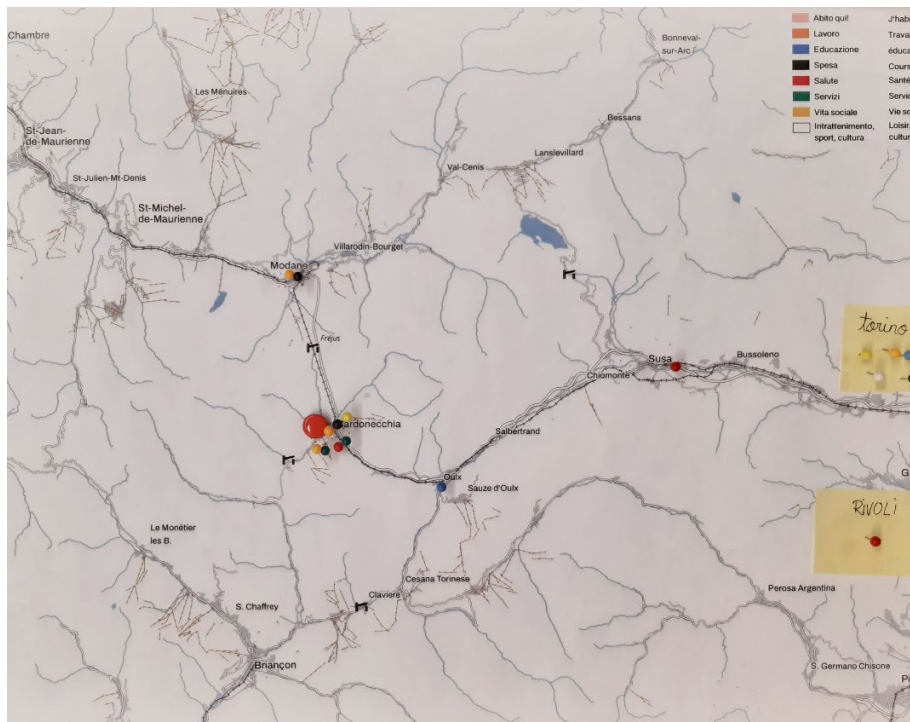
it is necessary to ask for a **prior authorization** from the Italian ASL (Local Health Unit), which then reimburses the treatment costs (based to the European Cross-border Healthcare Directive). Also, since the gynecology and obstetrics services of the Susa Hospital has been closed few years ago, the Italian women from upper Susa Valley give birth to Briançon hospital, as the nearest equipped hospitals in Italy are in Rivoli or Turin. The implementation of the **Quirinal Treaty is expected to be an accelerator for cross-border healthcare** between France and Italy.



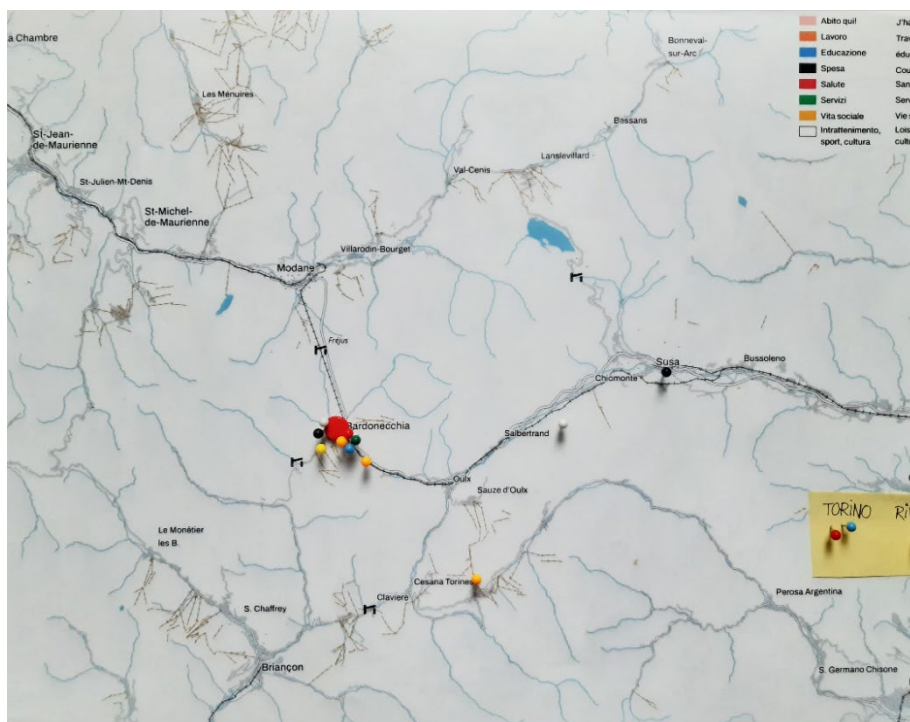
Participative mapping of a cross-border Italian doctor.
(16.07.2024)



Participative mapping of a representative of the Italian Red Cross.
(16.07.2024)



Participative mapping of a Councillor of the Municipality of Bardonecchia. (16.07.2024)



Participative mapping of a representative of the Italian Alpine Club. (16.07.2024)

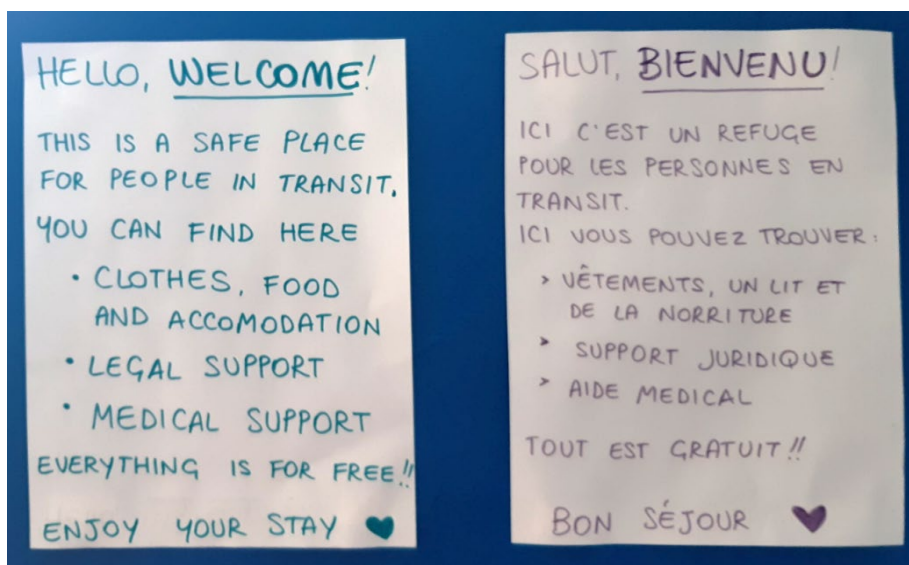
Visit the Fraternità Massi Refuge

Time: 18.00

Location: Oulx (IT)

The *Fraternità Massi* refuge is a safehouse operating on the Italian side for **humanitarian assistance for all immigrants** crossing the Hautes-Alpes Alpine border zone. The Refuge *Fraternità Massi* rely primarily on volunteers to run the operations and offer assistance in different forms: food, hospitality, mountain clothing as well as practical advice on the trails and medical assistance.

The doors of the *Rifugio Massi* open every day at 4 pm, immigrants are allocated a bed in the shared dormitory, shown the shower and washroom facilities, and offered warm food. Most of them will have left for the border early the following day, after a distribution of winter clothing managed by local volunteers. In the evening, when a large number of people has usually already arrived at the refuge, volunteer doctors appear in the dormitory for providing free medical consultations and medications.



Welcome message to immigrants at Fraternità Massi refuge. (16.07.2024)



Prayers
carpets for
Muslim
immigrants at
Fraternità
Massi refuge.
(16.07.2024)



Drawings on
the wall in the
Fraternità
Massi refuge.
(16.07.2024)

Wednesday, 17th July 2024

SUSA(IT)

FERRARA MONCENISIO (FR)

MONCENISIO (FR)

MODANE (FR)

12.30 Interview with Italian-French cross-border doctor in Susa

16.00 City tour in Susa

17.00 Crossing the State Road 25, the Napoleonic Road

18.00 Visit of the Eco- Museum “Le Terre al Confine” (Ferrera Moncenisio)

18.30 Crossing Mont Cenis pass

19.00 Crossing the Fréjus Pass

Notes

The third working day focused mainly on the historical aspects of the research. After a morning of work collecting and archiving documents, we travelled to Susa to interview a doctor who lives a real cross-border life in both private and working contexts. We then moved to Susa to visit some monuments which are particularly representative of the cross-border exchanges and synergies between peoples that lived in this area. We then crossed the Mont Cenis pass via the Napoleonic Road which is an extraordinary example of civil engineering work that has connected for the first time Italy and France through a carriageable road.

Tour of Susa

Time: 16:00

Location: Susa

We travelled to Susa for an interview with an Italian doctor who worked in France for many years. After the interview, we decided to visit Susa because its symbolic history linked to French border. The road to France, also known as **Via Francigena**, passes through Susa and it represents, among the others, one of the most monumental roads for pilgrimage and trade travel.

Also, the Arch of Augustus, built at the end of the 1st century BC, it's a symbol of renewed alliance between peoples. The Arch of Augustus was in fact meant to commemorate an alliance of Romans and Alpine people. It is a **symbol of integration of different cultures**, as recalled a stele placed next to the monument in 1992.



Signpost for the Via Francigena in Susa.
(17.07.2024)



Arch of
Augustus in
Susa.
(17.07.2024)



Stele:
“On the
bimillenary of the
Arch that
ideally joins the
origins and the
fulfilment of
the process
towards the
European
Union, the
peoples of the
Western Alps,
heirs of the
Cozian tribes
and of the
historic
alliance here
stipulated
between Cotius
the king of the
Alps and
Augustus,
founder of the
Roman Empire,
wishing
stronger and
more fruitful
understandings
between
peoples and
nations”.
(17.07.2024)

Road 25, the Napoleonic Road

Time: 17:00

Location: Mont Cenis

Crossing the State

In the afternoon we decided to explore the Italian-French border on the Mont Cenis side. From Susa, we drive along State Road 25, which corresponds to the Royal Road (*Strada Reale*) made roadable by Napoleon in one of the most memorable engineering works to easily link France to Italy in a new and strategic Mont Cenis route.



Napoleonic
Road from the
Piana di San
Nicolao,
France.
(17.07.2024)

Thematic focus: The Mont Cenis Lake

The Mont Cenis Lake is located over the Mont Cenis pass and lies entirely on French territory, although geographically it is largely in the Susa Valley and therefore it belongs to the Po basin (IT) rather than the Rhone basin (FR). Today, the containment dams allow about 320 million cubic meters of water. The lake in fact belongs to a complex network of tunnels for capturing water from the mountains in both countries and feeds the hydroelectric power stations of Enel in Venaus (IT) and EDF in Villarodin (FR). This energy supply aspects make the Mont Cenis Lake a strategic place being hotly contested since 1947 when the Treaty of Paris redrew the borders according to the new set of powers after World War II.

Tour of Ferrara Moncenisio and the Eco-museum “*Le terre al confine*”

Time: 18:00

Location: Ferrara Moncenisio (IT)

Ferrera Moncenisio is one of the **smallest villages in Italy** that has also a great historical significance due its geographical position near France, being called “**the door to the Western Alps**”. The Via Francigena passes through Ferrara Moncenisio. The village used to be the first stop along the downhill to the Susa Valley and the first departure for Mont Cenis pass.



The small municipality of Moncenisio.
(17.07.2024)

Compared to the rest of the visited territories in the border between France and Italy, we perceived that the inhabitants of Ferrera Moncenisio **harbor a strong historical resentment** towards France, to which the Treaty of Paris, they said: *“effectively ceded a large part of our mountain territory”*.

The visit to the **eco-museum “Le terre al confine”** also documents the millennial history of the Mont Cenis Pass, which has played a crucial role of corridor for migrations, trade and smuggling, religious pilgrimages, and military invasions. The museum also shows a glimpse of daily life of mountain crafts.



Lake della
Ferrera,
Ferrera
Moncenisio.
(17.07.2024)

Crossing the Fréjus Pass

Time: 19:00

Location: Fréjus (IT-FR)

At the end of the day, in view of the second part of our journey on the French side, we descend the Susa Valley towards Bardonecchia to pass through the Fréjus tunnel and we arrived in Modane. The high cost of the ticket for passing through the tunnel is one of the most evident **obstacles to cross-border mobility**. For a passage through the tunnel, the cost of a return ticket for a simple car is 68 euros. The cost is reduced to about a half for season tickets. No special reduction is foreseen for residents of the cross-border area.



Toll booths on the Italian side, Fréjus Tunnel. (17.07.2024)



Entrance of the Fréjus Tunnel from the Italian border. (17.07.2024)

Wednesday, 18th July 2024

MODANE (FR)

- 09.00** Interview with the mayor of Modane and the Vice-president of the Alte Valli Conference
- 11.30** Interview with an employee of the Communauté de Communes Haute Maurienne Vanoise at the Artisans - Commerce - Industry Unit
- 15.00** Visit to the Esseillon forts (Modane)
- 17.00** Photographic tour of Haute Maurienne Vanoise Valley: research centres and state-of-the-art facilities
- 18.30** Visit the Museobar the border Museum (Modane)

Notes

The fourth day of the research took place entirely on French territory. The first interview with the Mayor of Modane provided us with a better understanding of the cross-border governance in which the Hautes Vallées Conference operates.

The second interview introduced us to the economic and industrial context of the area, investigating the level of the current cross-border relations in this field. The afternoon was dedicated to discovering the territory through a visit to the Esseillon Forts, the Modane surroundings and the Museobar Museum.

Essilion Forts Tour

Time: 15.00

Location: Maurienne Valley (FR)

The term «Esseilon» describes a sculpted rocky passage providing access to the Aussois plateau, situated on the old Mont Cenis road. This series of stepped fortification is one of the defensive systems of the kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia. Built to prevent passage of armies from France, king Victor-Emmanuel worked on this impressive structure began in 1818. The forts began French since 1860. This heritage site now represents a **gateway to peacetime European culture and history**. The forts are of great interest for tourists also for the sports (zip lines, walks, hikes and trails) and fun activities (treasure hunts in the form of spy stories) which are therein organized.



Entrance to
Fort Victor
Emmanuel.
(18.07.2024)



Sports activities (climbing) organized in the Fort Victor Emmanuel. (18.07.2024)



Passage inside Fort Victor Emmanuel. (18.07.2024)

Photographic tour of Haute Maurienne Vanoise Valley: research centres and state-of-the-art facilities

Time: 17.00

Location: Maurienne Valley (FR)

Given its proximity to the Italian border, the small area just outside Modane has become a **strategic hub for national infrastructure**. This strategic location has attracted a concentration of important facilities in **scientific research** and **transnational mobility**. The area's border position has also facilitated the development of advanced communications and technologies.

The **Modane Underground Laboratory** is a subterranean particle physics laboratory located within the Fréjus Road Tunnel. It is jointly operated by the French National Centre for Scientific Research and the Atomic Energy and Alternative Energies Commission in partnership with the University of Savoie. The laboratory sits almost exactly in the middle of the 12.6-kilometer road tunnel and it is **the deepest scientific site in Europe** taking advantage of the 1,700 m of rock separating it from the peaks to shelter it from cosmic rays. It is used by the international community to address subjects such as astrophysics, the origin of the universe, earth sciences, gamma spectrometry and biology.



Maurienne
Valley.
(18.07.2024)

The **ONERA wind tunnel research centre of Modane-Avrieux** is the French national aerospace centre specialised in aerospace and defence sectors. Taking advantage of the impressive hydric resources, the Centre has four wind tunnels, including **the world's most powerful**, where the aerodynamic properties of the machines are tested. The Arc River, which rises at the foot of the valley's glaciers, has encouraged the construction of dams and hydroelectric power stations that provide renewable energy and have contributed to the installation of the Onera wind tunnel.

The **Avrieux, Villarodin-Bourget, Modane site** is the construction site of the ventilation shafts for the base of the Euroalpin tunnel Lyon-Turin. The Four parallel vertical tunnels at an altitude of 1,300 m must reach the underground station of Modane for ventilation and safety purpose. The Lyon-Turin railway base tunnel is part of the so-called Mediterranean Corridor, the main east-west axis in the TEN-T Network south of the Alps.



ONERA wind
tunnel
research
centre of
Modane-
Avrieux.
(18.07.2024)



Excavation
deposit site
Avrieux,
Villarodin-
Bourget,
Modane, the
Lyon-Turin
railway base.
(18.07.2024)



Access to
Avrieux,
Villarodin-
Bourget, and
Modane is
through the
green shed,
blending
seamlessly
with the
surrounding
landscape to
protect the
heritage of the
Esseillon forts.
(18.07.2024)

Visit to the Museobar

Time: 18:00

Location: Modane (FR)

The *Museobar*, located in front of the train station, took us on a journey through the history of the town of Modane. The presence of the border has in fact boosted this town. Modane was a border town with an **international train station**. In the first decades of the 20th century, the town undertook profound transformations, all focused on the **border economy**, with the installation of customs forwarding agents, trading houses, banks, stockbrokers, French and Italian foreign trade officials and, above all, the railroads. In 1993, the entry into force of the **Schengen Agreement** started a process of de-functionalization of the border. Modane saw its population plummet.

Today Modane has a population of about 4,000 and it remains in its essence a transit city which has severely suffered from the economic crises of recent times. Connections to Italy are effectively limited: the rail network is out of use due to a landslide that fell in August 2023. The securing is still in place but work is slow due to unstable conditions of the mountain.



One of the
room of the
Museum
Museobar,
Modane.
(18.07.2024)



Local for rent
in the city
center of
Modane.
(18.07.2024)



The Thursday
afternoon
market in
Modane's
central square.
(18.07.2024)

Thursday, 19th July 2024

MODANE (FR)

SAINT JEAN DE MAURIENNE (FR)

SAINT MICHEL DE MAURIENNE (FR)

09.00 Interview with a member of the French Red Cross Association (Modane)

11.00 Interview with the Mayor of Saint Jean de Maurienne (St. Jean de Maurienne)

14.00 Interview with an employee at the Territorial Development Division, CCMG
(St. Michel Maurienne)

Notes

On the fifth and final day of research, we chose to travel into the Maurienne Valley for some interviews in the towns of St. Jean and St. Michel. The Saint Jean town is the most populated town in the Valley, it offers cultural events and many other services. In particular, St. Jean-de-Maurienne is supposed to be the new international station of the new Lyon-Turin line in 2030. For this role the town is currently playing a crucial role in cross-border relations with Italy.



City Hall of
Saint Jean de la
Maurienne.
(19.07.2024)

Interview with the Mayor of Saint Jean de Maurienne

Time: 11:00

Location: St. Jean Maurienne

The new Mayor of Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne is very much in favor of opening up new exchanges with Italy, whose culture, he underlines, is deeply rooted in the history of the city as a result of the Italian immigration in the 1960s and 1970s. Saint Jean's proximity to the transalpine border places the town at the **core of the Italian-French cross-border synergies**. The future therefore looks towards Italy also in view of the opening of the **international station along the Lyon-Turin railway line by 2030**.

On the subject of cross-border mobility, the Mayor also announced the opening of a **new stop at Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne** on the Paris-Milan route, from 1 December 2024. Although the serious consequences of the landslide in the Fréjus tunnel have paralyzed transalpine rail traffic for almost one year, the additional stop on this strategic route will **renew passenger mobility**.



Saint-Jean-de-Maurienne cultural centre.
(19.07.2024)



Road panel for the start of work on the St Jean de Maurienne railway interconnection. (19.07.2024)



TRIMET aluminum company, one of the most important factories in the Maurienne Valley. (19.07.2024)



04

**Reflections on the
fieldwork's process**

Transportation

The primary challenge in organizing our cross-border trip was transportation. Our project, focused on photographic surveys and interviews, required a level of travel flexibility that local public transportation couldn't provide. Limited options, compounded by a landslide that disrupted the railway, made efficient travel planning impossible. Renting a car proved to be the best solution. This experience highlights how limited public transportation, especially in cross-border regions, can significantly hinder free movement for those without personal vehicles.

Language

This cross-border region exhibits distinct linguistic patterns. While Italian and French are the official languages of their respective countries, their use is largely confined to each side of the border. Unlike other Italian regions bordering France, this area lacks a shared language or dialect that bridges the linguistic divide. This absence of a common vernacular highlights the region's linguistic heterogeneity. During our fieldwork, fluency in both Italian and French proved invaluable for understanding the nuances of the local context. Interestingly, we observed that knowledge of French is more prevalent among Italians in this region than knowledge of Italian among their French counterparts. This asymmetry in language acquisition speaks to the unique dynamics of this cross-border area.

Perception of the border

The Schengen Treaty's abolition of border controls has dramatically reshaped life for residents of this cross-border region. While intended to foster integration, it has paradoxically led to unforeseen consequences. Towns like Bardonecchia and Modane, once thriving on border-related commerce, have experienced a decline. The disappearance of customs-related jobs triggered a demographic shift and exposed the lack of economic diversification. This highlights the need for long-term strategies to adapt these communities to a new era of cross-border interaction.

A small territory facing global challenges

This cross-border region vividly illustrates the complex power dynamics between central governments and peripheral communities. Large-scale infrastructure projects, driven by national and trans-European interests, have significantly reshaped the landscape. The mountainous terrain, with its unique features like water flow and the border itself, has heavily influenced political decisions regarding these projects. This has led to a pattern of inclusion and exclusion, often marginalizing local communities while prioritizing national strategic goals.

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