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SPODNJE PODRAVJE

Introduction

Spodnje Podravje, a region situated in the north-eastern part of Slovenia, in an area that is called sub-Pannonian Slovenia, was chosen as a sample of a locale that has a fairly well-preserved rural appearance with related functions and activities. The social and economic transition reached this region at a stage when its demographic structure was still relatively under-developed because of its belated integration in the more intensive processes of deagrarianization. On one hand the region is still characterized by rural overpopulation, an aging rural population, and an unfavorable system of land ownership, and, on the other hand, it also has an unfavorable structure of jobs in non-agricultural professions. After the establishment of the new state border, the region became even more marginalized: a number of economic ties established in the former common state were cut off, along with numerous links within the fields of education, health care, and employment. It must be stressed that Spodnje Podravje borders on Croatia's economically and relatively highly developed Čakovec-Varaždin region. Therefore, the partial interruption of previous trans-border co-operation had an even harder impact on the region. A particular problem is also posed by the fact that farmers from both neighboring countries own land on both sides of the border.

The region examined covers 1038.6 square kilometers and according to Slovenia's new division of local communities (adopted in January 1994) comprises eleven municipalities (Ptuj, Kidričevo, Majšperk, Videm, Zavrč, Gorišnica, Dornava, Juršinci, Drestenik-Trnovska vas, Ormož, and Ljutomer). Prior to that, Spodnje Podravje was divided into three municipalities: Ptuj, Ormož, and Ljutomer.

Natural and geographical characteristics of Spodnje Podravje in the light of environmental vulnerability and ecological problems

Spodnje Podravje features two main landscape types, both of which are also characteristic of the entire sub-Pannonian and Pannonian part of Slovenia: wide plains along the Mura and Drava rivers broken into vast gravel-clay terraces, and relatively low hills with long ridges separated by slightly wider valleys along larger creeks. The hills are mainly composed of Miocene marl and sand sediments, and the

valley bottoms are of clay and clay-sand alluvia, which makes them moist and exposed to frequent floods.

In a special environmental vulnerability study, based on Slovenia's new Environmental Protection Act, we assessed, using an original methodology, the self-cleaning abilities of the environment, the scope of its actual strain, the still acceptable scope of environmental strain, and both the ultimate vulnerability of the environment as a whole and of its individual components (air, water, underground water, soil, relief). The study was conducted on 26 relatively homogenous landscape-ecological units, of which two are situated in the plains along the Mura river, seven in Slovenske gorice (the hills and the valleys between them), eight in the plain along the Drava river, two in Dravinjske gorice, and six in the Haloze hills and the valleys between them (Environmental Vulnerability Study ..., 1996).



The easternmost part of the Haloze with vineyards, close to Croatian border.

The study revealed that most vulnerable among the components of the environment were water resources, particularly underground waters and smaller water courses characterized by extremely low summer discharges. Since the areas with underground water represent an extremely important natural source of water supply from the regional and national perspective, the use of land in these alluvial plains will have to be adapted to the ecological vulnerability of the regions water supply and particularly applies to agriculture, which often puts an excessive strain on areas with underground water. Other components of the environment in particular units are also

very vulnerable, a minor exception to this being, as a rule, only air. The processes representing the greatest natural threat to particular areas are floods and landslides, which heighten the vulnerability of the relief and soil.

On the whole it has been established that the greatest level of environmental vulnerability — which is of course also linked with restrictions on further exploitation and use of that environment — was observed in the case of reclaimed land in the valleys amid Slovenske gorice, where the liability of soil and of the meadows and plains along the Mura and Drava rivers is particularly great because of their natural exposure to frequent floods, the shallow layer of riverside soil, the consequences of regulations, and the pollution of water courses. Less vulnerable are the terraces on the Dravsko polje and Ptujsko polje plains and the central part of Slovenske gorice. Other landscape-ecological components are characterized either by a greater self-cleaning ability and a larger strain or by a lesser strain and a reduction in natural regenerative abilities and are therefore less vulnerable as a whole, thus allowing eventual new, but expertly supervised activities which affect the environment.

Thanks to its relative openness and the resulting good ventilation, air pollution in this area does not exceed the permitted levels, despite the fact that only a few years ago the aluminium factory in Kidričevo was discharging the highest levels of SO₂ industrial emissions into Slovenia's environment.

One of the major ecological problems of Spodnje Podravje is the pollution of its surface waters, accompanied by occasionally high levels of groundwater pollution. The quality of water courses is inadequate, with the Drava, Mura, Dravinja, and Pesnica rivers falling into the second and third water quality grades, and that of the Ščavnica into the lowest — fourth grade. The natural self-cleaning ability of the Drava has been notably reduced by the construction of a chain of hydroelectric power plants in its upper course. In Slovenia, the Drava's pollution is gradually increasing, all the way to the state border with Croatia. Occasionally, high lead and zinc levels are measured, whereas around Ormož the impact of agriculture is evident from the relatively high atrazine content. The Mura was found to contain nitrates, sulfates, detergents, and mineral oils. Before passing into neighboring Croatia, the water's quality is additionally deteriorated by the excessively polluted water of its tributary, the Ščavnica. The quality of groundwater on Dravsko polje is poor and over a number of years high levels of nitrates and phytopharmaceutical agents have been measured and there is also an elevated level of pesticides. The condition of groundwater on Mursko polje is better, with nitrate and pesticide concentrations not exceeding Slovenian standards (Stanje okolja, 1996). Groundwater pollution is greater than one would suspect judging from the quantities of mineral fertilizers used and the energy intensity of agriculture in general, which is assessed at 40–60 GJ/ha. in the examined region. Of this, mineral fertilizers account for about one third. According to experts (Slesser), this corresponds to the threshold value, which is already being exceeded by agricultural pollution that spreads outside farms. The reasons for increased groundwater pollution are to be sought primarily in the thinner and more permeable pedolo-

gical cover, with climatic humidity accelerating the washing off of nitrates. Moreover, it can be assessed that agriculture is not ecologically adequate. (Radinja, 1996).

Settlement

The region's favorable relief and climatic conditions (the average altitude is 251 meters, the average slope is 6 degrees, the average annual amount of sun energy taken in is 4100 MJ/sq. m.) have largely contributed to the relatively dense, but uneven, distribution of settlements. The settlements are situated on slightly raised and warmer valley fringes and slopes, where they are not prone to floods and very frequent landslides.

Table 1: Settlement structure (1991).

municipality	Number of settle. inhabit.		Density	% of population in urb. areas, towns, rural settl.			Inhabit. 1996/91		Difference %
Ljutomer	69	18,612	108	38.8	19.6	41.6	+	40	0.2
Ormož	81	17,570	83	22.8	13.1	64.1	+	171	0.9
Desternik – Trnov. vas	31	4942	66	6.5	–	93.5	+	109	2.2
Dornava	12	2609	92	27.8	–	72.2	+	40	1.5
Gorišnica	24	6094	100	36.6	–	63.4	0	–	0
Juršinci	13	2382	66	16.2	–	83.8	–	3	-0.1
Kidričevo	18	6606	92	21.0	–	79.0	–	104	-1.6
Majšperk	30	5599	51	29.5	–	70.5	+	14	0.3
Ptuj	26	31,473	266	12.1	35.8	52.1	+	881	2.8
Videm	44	7639	60	18.7	–	81.2	+	75	1
Zavrč	9	1409	73	–	–	100	+	10	0.7

Source: Dolenc, 1995; Ravbar, 1996, and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia

The fact that the major portion of the population lives in rural settlements indicates that the region investigated is predominantly agriculture-orientated. Unlike other Slovenian towns, none of its three urban centers (Ljutomer, Ormož, Ptuj) have created an extended urbanized hinterland (map, Ravbar). A third of the settlements in Spodnje Podravje have between 100 and 200 inhabitants, and a fifth of them have 200 to 300 inhabitants. Larger settlements with over 500 inhabitants account for only 7 % of all settlements. Viewed as a whole, this region has a population density exceeding the national average of 97 persons per sq. km, yet there are vast differences between individual municipalities: from 51 persons/sq. km. in the Majšperk municipality, which

includes a large part of the sparsely inhabited Haloze hills, to that of Ptuj with an average population density of 266 persons per sq. km, which ranks it 12th among all Slovenian municipalities. Ptuj, with its immediate urban fringe, has the highest population density (more than 1000 persons/sq. km) of all three towns in Spodnje Podravje, the population densities of Ormož and Ljutomer with their immediate urbanized hinterlands being almost half lower.

During the first five years subsequent to the establishment of the new Slovenian state, the population in the eleven municipalities surveyed increased only marginally — mostly in the Ptuj and Desternik municipalities (by over 2 %), whereas in all other municipalities it stagnated or even declined (Juršinci). It is necessary to mention that the sluggish population growth in particular municipalities can be attributed primarily to a decline or stagnation in the growth of rural settlements, while urbanized and town settlements were, as a rule, growing.

The settlements underwent the greatest changes in the 1960s and 1970s, undoubtedly as a result of accelerated industrialization and related social changes within the population. Over the last 30 years, a third of the communities, accounting for one fifth of the region's total population, have shown continual growth. The greatest changes, however, have not taken place in towns but in their urban fringes. In some of these settlements populations have doubled or even tripled (Ravbar, 1996). Contemporary settlement patterns have been affected by different factors than those of the past, which also results in their different distribution and forms. Particularly noticeable is the fact that they are much less adapted to natural conditions and that they did not take into account the natural limitations (e.g. flood areas) which once were used to determine the position and form of settlements. Among the contemporary factors affecting settlement patterns we should mention primarily the distribution and proximity of the work place, the proximity of traffic routes, the possibilities of connecting to the infrastructure networks (roads, water supply, sewage system ...), the proximity of a central settlement with supply and service activities (Drožg, 1995).

The lowland areas of the region surveyed are faced with problems associated with inadequately developed municipal infrastructures, the excessive use of chemicals in agriculture resulting in the extreme pollution of groundwater and, indirectly, one of Slovenia's greatest drinking water reserves, disorderly expansion of settlements, etc. The hilly and highland parts of the region are also faced with the problems of depopulation, abandoned land cultivation and poor infrastructure.

The region can be roughly divided into the gravitational hinterlands of three urban centers: Ptuj, Ormož, and Ljutomer. These are not only the largest employment, supply, and educational centers, but also the seats of former municipalities and have therefore retained a number of administrative and other central functions. A general analysis of the functional-gravitational areas in Spodnje Podravje shows that the development of centers and related gravitational areas has been uneven. The fact is, that apart from the three centers mentioned, only smaller rural centers prevail.

Basic demographic characteristics

According to the latest regular census (1991), this region had a population of 104,935. A survey of changes within the number of the population over the last 30 years shows a marked predominance of municipalities in which these changes were negative, since none of the municipalities have managed to preserve the natural increase in its territory. Even the two biggest municipalities, Ptuj and Ljutomer, where the population has slightly increased, have retained only less than half of their natural increase.

Slovenia is characterized by a positive net migration balance, but in the region surveyed emigration always exceeded immigration. Emigration was most intensive in the 1960s (-6.5 %), in the following decade it slowed down a bit, and dropped significantly in the 1980s (-1.2 %) due to general unemployment. Furthermore, we can claim with justification that Spodnje Podravje is already quite exhausted in terms of population, a warning sign which also comes from its natural increase rate. During the period between 1961-1990, only 27.8 % of the value of natural increase contributed to population growth, the remaining 72.2 % moved out (Natek, 1996).

Emigration, which was most intensive in Spodnje Podravje after World War II, has left behind visible signs of the devastation of cultural landscape. The last several decades have also witnessed a growing inflow of urban dwellers building summer houses in economically undeveloped areas. Periodical stays of urban dwellers in the countryside are bringing totally new elements into the landscape.

The data in the table 2 indicates that the unfavorable demographic trends also continued during the first five years of this decade. The share of the younger population (below 15 years of age) kept on declining, although to a lesser degree in the predominantly rural municipalities than in the more urbanized ones. Parallel to this, the number of old people (above 65 years of age) continued to increase, their numbers, as a rule, exceeding the national average (the only exceptions to this are the two municipalities: Zavrč and Dornava). On the basis of data from the 1991 census, seven out of the eleven municipalities surveyed fell, according to the index of aging, into the group with a mature population (between 0.41 and 0.55), and four into the group with an older population (0.56-0.70). Five years later the situation was different: already six municipalities were characterized by a predominant proportion of old people, two of them had a very old population (one of them is the Ljutomer municipality), whereas the remaining three still had a relatively favorable mature age composition (Zavrč, Juršinci, and Dornava).

However, these unfavorable demographic trends, are not reflective of data for Slovenia as a whole. While in the two decades after 1971 the index of aging increased by 0.12, its growth in the first half of this decade was extremely swift, raising from 0.53 to 0.66 or by 25 %, which means that Slovenia has already attained the medium level of the aged population. Therefore, in the first years of this decade Slovenia's population aged by almost the same percentage as in the previous twenty years (Dolenc, 1995).

Table 2: Basic population age-groups (1991–1995).

Municipality	Young		Working		Old		Aging index	
	% (91)	I (95/91)	% (91)	I (95/91)	% (91)	I (95/91)	1991	1995
Ljutomer	19.9	90.5	64.8	102.4	15.3	107.8	0.61	0.75
Ormož	19.8	96.3	64.5	102.2	15.7	104.6	0.63	0.70
Desternik	21.9	96.4	63.7	103.7	14.3	105.4	0.51	0.57
Dornava	20.4	98.1	67.5	101.4	12.2	111.0	0.46	0.55
Gorišnica	20.4	93.4	63.4	102.5	16.2	97.6	0.63	0.66
Juršinci	22.5	94.6	63.5	101.7	14.0	106.3	0.48	0.55
Kidričevo	19.1	94.5	66.7	101.2	14.2	114.2	0.55	0.71
Majšperk	20.9	92.9	64.2	100.6	14.9	111.9	0.56	0.67
Ptuj	20.5	90.6	67.6	102.8	11.9	113.1	0.44	0.57
Videm	21.3	94.6	64.0	102.3	14.6	107.6	0.52	0.62
Zavrč	20.6	95.9	67.5	100.8	11.9	115.5	0.46	0.42
SLOVENIA	20.6	90.2	65.5	102.3	13.9	110.4	0.53	0.66

Source: Dolenc, 1995.

Spodnje Podravje belongs among the relatively ethnically homogenous Slovenian areas, with non-Slovenes accounting for only 5 % of its population. Most numerous among them are Croats (about 1800) and Serbs (about 330). Croats mainly live in the border belt, where they moved because of marriages, and in towns where they moved to because of employment. Serbs are a markedly urban population (over 80 % of them live in urban communities, especially in Ptuj).

A urban pattern of settlement is also observed in the case of Albanians, who work exclusively in the service sector (Zupančič, 1996).

The analysis of data regarding employment and jobs also confirms that the region surveyed is still heavily oriented towards agricultural activities (table 3). Only the municipalities with industrial plants (e.g. Majšperk, Kidričevo) have an above-average number of jobs in the secondary industry. The development of the tertiary or service industry in the region is still at a very early stage, the number of jobs in this industry is far below the national average. From this we should exclude the municipalities with less than 100 employees, where the structure of jobs is a random reflection of one or two job-providing facilities (e.g. shops, schools, the hospital in Dornava ...).

The amount of unemployed persons in Spodnje Podravje is far above the Slovenian average (table 4). The municipality of Zavrč has the highest unemployment rate among all Slovenian municipalities. The region is faced with the problems of an excessive agricultural work force and high unemployment in industry, which is also evident from the unemployment growth index between 1991 and 1995. These problems are most strongly felt by the municipalities with industrial plants, which were first hit by the transition (Ormož, Kidričevo, Majšperk), and on the other hand by the mainly

agricultural peripheral municipalities in Slovenske gorice and Haloze (Zavrč, Desternik, Videm).

Table 3: Structure of jobs (1995).

Municipality	No. of persons employed	Primary (%)	Secondary (%)	Tertiary (%)	Quaternary (%)
Ljutomer	4164	3.2	63.0	14.1	19.7
Ormož	3375	9.8	52.6	15.9	21.7
Desternik	53			20.8	79.2
Dornava	430	15.1	–	–	82.8
Gorišnica	304	–	36.2	13.8	50.0
Juršinci	34	–	–	17.6	82.4
Kidričevo	1921	3.5	76.1	6.9	13.5
Majšperk	710	–	86.8	4.5	8.7
Ptuj	9500	10.8	38.7	24.5	26.0
Videm	329	10.9	12.5	33.1	43.5
Zavrč	57	45.6	7.0	10.5	36.9
SLOVENIA		2.1	48.8	24.8	24.3

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.

Table 4: Unemployment in 1995 and the share of the rural population (1991).

Municipality	% Jobless (95)	I (95/91)	% Rural population (1991)
Ljutomer	10.6	197	21.0
Ormož	12.6	233	27.9
Desternik	14.7	225	31.6
Dornava	12.6	178	19.4
Gorišnica	13.6	163	23.3
Juršinci	16.9	177	30.6
Kidričevo	11.4	232	16.6
Majšperk	11.9	230	20.3
Ptuj	12.7	190	8.7
Videm	14.3	203	22.5
Zavrč	20.4	213	24.3
SLOVENIA	8.8	196	7.6

According to data from the latest census, about a quarter of the region's population lived on farms. The entire region is characterized by a high portion of rural population, which is well above the national average. The bulk of the rural population

lives in the municipalities situated in Slovenske gorice. The only exception, in this respect, is the urban municipality of Ptuj. But despite its relatively high level of urbanization, the rural population still accounts for more than 8 % of its total population.

The analysis of income data, as an indirect indicator of a population's economic strength, has cautioned that the municipalities surveyed show below-average values if compared with data for the entire country. The structure of income sources has a significant impact on the differences in the economic strength of the region's population. Salaries account for more than a quarter, pensions for a tenth, and all other sources of agricultural income account for 2 % of the region's total incomes. Compared with data for the entire of Slovenia, an above-average share of income from cadastral sources is observed. The inadequate evaluation of the production capacity of agricultural land and hence the income-generating capacity of agriculture on the basis of cadastral revenue represents a huge obstacle for a realistic assessment of the economic strength of the inhabitants in rural areas (Piry, 1996).

Economic bases

Spodnje Podravje is an extremely important agricultural region within the framework of Slovenia. As a result of its considerable natural diversity, characteristic cultivation areas have developed, oriented primarily to crop and livestock production, viticulture and fruit growing. The intensive agricultural use of land is evident from the high quantity of fields in the region surveyed (11 %). In Mursko polje and Dravsko polje, as well as in the valley of the Ščavnica river, fields even account for more than 40 % of the total area. These are areas with intensive agricultural production focused mainly on the production of sugar beet, corn, and wheat. The share of vineyards (3 %) exceeds the Slovenian average by three times — particularly outstanding in this respect are Slovenske gorice and Haloze. The share of forests (29 %) is almost half smaller than the national average. The region's landscape diversity is further accentuated by the great differences in land use between the mostly cultivated, sun-exposed southern, south-eastern, and south-western slopes and the shady northern slopes which are mainly covered with woods.

Spodnje Podravje accounts for 5.2 % of Slovenia's total population, for 3.7 % of its industrial work force, and preceding the transition, in 1990, it created 3.6 % of the gross domestic product of Slovenia's industrial sector. The distribution of industry is extremely uneven, with high concentrations in Ptuj, Ljutomer, and Ormož, which provide 72 % of all jobs in the region's industrial sector. Six out of the eleven municipalities, or, more precisely, 11 communities have industrial plants. Over the last 20 years no industrial facilities have been developed in newly-created settlements; in this respect priority has been given to former municipal centers, which has indirectly contributed towards an even more erratic socioeconomic development of the region (Slavec, 1996).



Ormož is an urban settlement by the Drava, located in the middle of rather agrarian environs.

Among the key location factors affecting the development of industry are proximity to the Drava river and proximity to the Maribor–Ptuj–Zagreb and Ptuj–Ormož trunk roads. All settlements with industrial plants are also located in the immediate proximity of railways. The share of people employed in industry accounts for 26.8 % of the region's total working population (1991 census). The corresponding figure for Slovenia is 35.7 %. The most developed industrial branches are the food industry, which is directly linked with the agricultural hinterland, the energy-intensive metal-working and metal industries (the proximity of the hydroelectric power plants on the Drava river), and the textile industry. A characteristic feature is the predominance of small industrial plants. In the two largest industrial towns, Ptuj and Ljutomer, more than 90 % of companies employ less than 250 workers. In Ormož, this share is a bit smaller (78 %), but all other industrial settlements (except Kidričevo, which boasts the biggest Slovenian aluminum factory employing over 1000 persons) have very small industrial plants.

Gradually, the region is also establishing itself as a tourist area by developing specific forms of tourism: cultural-educational tourism, which is rooted in its rich cultural heritage, and wine tourism, which indirectly fosters the renewal and preservation of the agricultural landscape. Spa tourism is also gaining importance, thanks to mineral hot water springs in Ptuj and Banovci.

An analysis of the access of the inhabitants of Spodnje Podravje to road networks, rail links and bus transportation has shown, that in this respect, the region strongly lags behind the Slovenian average. A look at the flow of traffic across the newly established state border reveals that these transits are mainly local in nature. Only three border crossings (Gruškovje, Središče ob Dravi, and Zavrč) play a more significant role in international traffic flows, but due to greater transitivity towards the south-east after the end of the war in the Balkans, these are becoming overloaded. The bulk of the traffic is made up by passenger cars of Croatian citizens who come to Slovenia to shop or work. Slovenes from the border areas decide to go to Croatia to visit their friends and relatives and to work in fields or vineyards. Analyses show that the newly established state border has had no significant impact on the direction of traffic flows but has prolonged the time of travel (Herga, Plevnik, 1996).

The attitude of the inhabitants of Spodnje Podravje towards the new state border

Some demographic and economic indicators caution that Spodnje Podravje lags behind the Slovenian average, but it is too early and professionally incorrect to associate this exclusively with the newly-created situation, that is, with the fact that the area has become a border region — situated along the newly-established state border. It should not be neglected, however, that the former republican borders between particular federal units of ex-Yugoslavia already represented noteworthy barriers, particularly administrative ones, although the flow of people and goods was less restricted in the past than it is today. But the openness of the border, within the framework of the former common state, nevertheless has enabled an easier flow of the population, as well as trans-border employment. On the other hand, the period of seven years (after the dissolution of the common state) is still too short a time to allow us to speak about any more noticeable changes in the socioeconomic structure within the population of this border region. Moreover, the last seven years of transition have brought about great changes in the economic, social, ownership, and other relations in the country as a whole.

Experts are already warning that the problems brought about by the new state border might affect almost the entire region, and in particular the hilly area of Haloze, where these problems might even threaten further settlement and life. According to Klemenčič, these problems could be solved, or at least mitigated, by putting into effect the concept of trans-border integration of border regions. By opening up the border, this would satisfy all the needs of the border population and exploit the advantages of life along the border.

○ A special problem is also posed by the fact that the inhabitants of the border areas own land on both sides of the border. In particular, there a lot of Croatian citizens own land in Slovenia. Depopulation and the abandonment of farming in Slovenian border

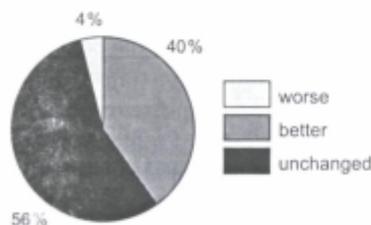
areas has also been linked to the purchases of land by Croatian citizens, which has additionally contributed to mixed land ownership. Especially frequent were the purchases of vineyards.

In the Ljutomer municipality and Haloze the ownership of land is particularly mixed, especially along the part of the border which frequently changed after the disintegration of the common Austro-Hungarian monarchy (Belec, 1996).

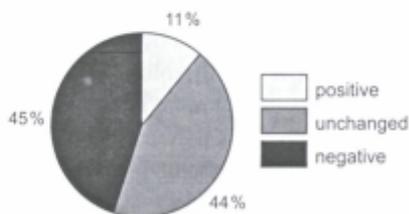
We assume that the new state border has a mainly psychological effect and that differences are more visible in behavioral elements, that is, in the perception of a new element in the landscape, rather than in objective statistical indicators. The feeling of discomfort was most evident during the war in neighboring Croatia. In order to perceive the attitude of the inhabitants towards the border we conducted a sample survey of 379 randomly selected local inhabitants and studied their life along the state border.

Our interest focused on the situation in the immediate border area and on daily contacts between the members of both nationalities living in the settlements along the border, which often take place independently of the wider regional or even inter-state relations. About half of the inhabitants questioned estimate that the relations between Slovenes and Croats have not changed since Slovenia's independence, but almost 40 % of them say that they have deteriorated. As many as 73 % even believe there is a danger that they might get entangled in conflicts, and only 13 % reject this possibility as utterly improbable.

Slovenes-Croats relations
after 1991



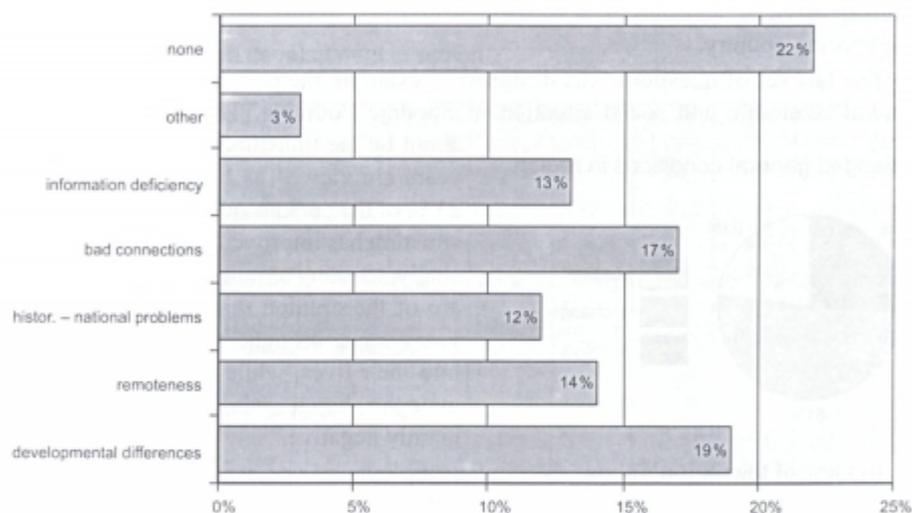
Influence of new state border in
Lower Podravje



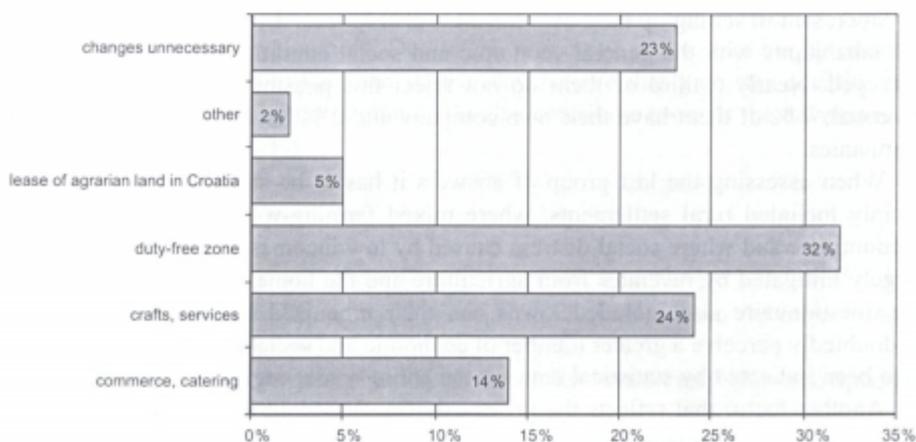
They assess that the new state border has a fairly negative impact (45 %), and only 11 % of them think the creation of the new border has had primarily positive effects. However, when we tried to find out if there are any obstacles to the development of trans-border economic and cultural cooperation, as many as one third of those surveyed replied that there are no significant obstacles, 17 % of them see a major problem with the different levels of economic development and spending power of the inhabitants of areas on both sides of the state border, and 17 % put the blame on bad trans-border links. Among the key obstacles they also see is the lack of mutual information (13 %),

historical and national problems (12 %), and the remoteness of both border areas (9 %). Almost half of the inhabitants of the Spodnje Podravje border region regularly watch Slovenian and Croatian television programs, 18 % of them watch Croatian programs exclusively, and 38 % watch only Slovenian programming..

Obstruction for better transborder contacts



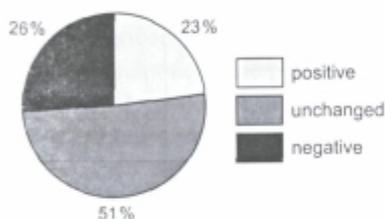
How to make better use of border position



For the future they propose primarily more economic contacts and a more even handed economic development of both border regions (35 %), and expect that local politicians will take care that the region will receive adequate attention at the state level (25 %). It is interesting to note that almost one third of those surveyed propose that the area be converted into a free trade zone, a quarter of them propose the development of various craft services, while another quarter believe the region is in no need of new activities. 14 % of them would expand the region's offer of trading and catering services, and only 5 % of them would like to hire agricultural land in the neighboring country.

The last set of questions was designed to examine the perception of the current general economic and social situation in Spodnje Podravje. The changes brought

Changed general conditions in region



about by the transition over the last seven years are viewed as fairly positive, since 23 % of the persons questioned believe the situation has improved since 1991. Surprisingly, as many as half of those questioned are of the opinion that the last couple of years have brought no special changes into their lives, while 26 % of them estimate the changes which have occurred are mainly negative.

In view of the region's above-average unemployment rate, it is also surprising that as many as 46 % of those questioned estimate there have been no essential changes in employment levels in their locality, and that 24 % of them believe they are in no danger of losing their jobs. Close to a third of them answered that they are unemployed (14 %) or feel that there is a threat that they might lose their jobs (16 %).

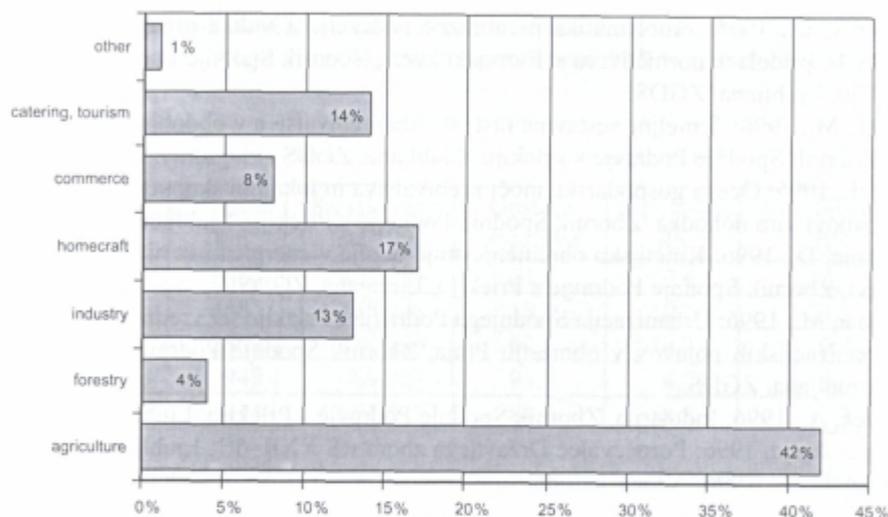
The fact that as many as 64 % of those questioned are satisfied with their present jobs and are therefore not considering the possibility of becoming self-employed or are interested in setting up their own business also reflects the relative satisfaction of the inhabitants with the general economic and social conditions in the border area surveyed. Nearly a third of them do not reject this possibility but regard it as a potential, 7 % of them have their own company and 2 % have already closed down companies.

When assessing the last group of answers it has to be stressed that the survey mainly included rural settlements, where mixed farming-working households still predominate and where social distress caused by low incomes and unemployment is largely mitigated by revenues from agriculture and the home production of food. If the questionnaire also included towns and their urbanized hinterlands, we would undoubtedly perceive a greater number of economic and social problems, which have also been indicated by statistical data for the entire border region.

Another factor that reflects the previously mentioned agricultural appearance of the region is that as many as 42 % of those questioned see the region's major deve-

lopment prospects precisely in agriculture, and expect that the state will help them in this direction also when they are faced with the anticipated changes and adjustments required by Slovenia's integration into the European Union. Among the significant challenges facing the region is the problem of scattered agricultural land (the average farm in this region has only 3.2 ha. of agricultural land compared to 14.7 ha. in EU countries), and an almost 50 % farm labor surplus (measured according to EU methodology, Kladnik, 1996).

Possible development in region



It is also interesting to note that the persons questioned see greater prospects for the region's development in home crafts (17 %) and catering and tourism (14 %) than in further industrial development. Due to the proximity of the state border and the presently higher prices in Croatian shops, they believe that a greater quantity and quality of shops in the border region could also contribute towards the development of their municipality (8 %).

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