

## IN-MIGRATION AS A NEW PROCESS IN DEMOGRAPHIC PROBLEM AREAS OF THE ALPS. GHOST TOWNS VS. AMENITY SETTLEMENTS IN THE ALPINE BORDER AREA BETWEEN ITALY AND SLOVENIA

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With 11 figures and 1 table

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**Summary:** Even recent academic studies consider the Italian Alps (with the exception of South Tyrol) still a huge out-migration and depopulation area. The present contribution, however, shows the new and remarkable phenomenon of in-migration. The study highlights the west-east difference in regard to the significance of the newcomers for the current structural change in peripheral Alpine regions: ensuing from the demographic turnaround in the French Alps starting in the mid-1980s, the process of amenity migration spread across the Italian Alps. The present study seeks to analyze its outcomes through a comparison of the Alpine border areas between Italy and Slovenia. The eastern part of the Friulian mountain region, particularly the border areas toward Slovenia, suffered the heaviest population losses in the Alps between WWII and 1990. It is therefore not surprising that here traditional spatial structures still continue to exist and in contrast to other demographic problem areas in the Italian Alps, e.g. the Cottian Alps, the population development has remained largely negative, though in the meantime the phenomenon of amenity migration has reached these Friulian communities. The west-east proliferation of amenity migration has also extended onto the Slovenian side, but its effects are less apparent due to the weaker depopulation processes during the period of the Yugoslavian regime. Regardless, the overall demographic reversal proclaims itself unmistakably and the resettlement of the once completely abandoned villages is a significant indicator for this tendency.

**Zusammenfassung:** Selbst in neueren Studien werden die italienischen Alpen (abgesehen von Südtirol) noch immer als riesiges Abwanderungs- und Entvölkerungsgebiet dargestellt. Vorliegender Beitrag soll jedoch auf den neuen und überraschenden Prozess der Zuwanderung aufmerksam machen und anhand der Amenity Migration den von den französischen Alpen ausgehenden neuen demographischen Trend in den italienischen Alpen aufzeigen. Diese Entwicklung wird schließlich im friulanisch-slowenischen Grenzgebiet näher verdeutlicht. Der östliche Teil der Friulanischen Alpen, vor allem der Grenzraum zu Slowenien, hatte zwischen dem Zweiten Weltkrieg und 1990 die stärksten Bevölkerungseinbußen der Alpen hinzunehmen, was sogar zur Entstehung von Ghost towns führte. Obwohl die Amenity Migration inzwischen auch dieses ostfriulanische Gebiet erreicht hat, ist es daher nicht verwunderlich, dass hier im Gegensatz zu anderen demographischen Problemregionen (z.B. die Cottischen Alpen) traditionelle Raumstrukturen stärker nachwirken und die Bevölkerungsentwicklung weiterhin noch rückläufig bleibt. Der West-Ost gerichtete Ausbreitungsvorgang der Amenity Migration hat ebenso die Gebiete jenseits der italienischen Grenze erfasst, doch treten dort die Auswirkungen im Vergleich zu Friaul nicht so offensichtlich zutage, zumal die Entvölkerungsprozesse während der jugoslawischen Periode geringer waren. Die gegenwärtige Wiederbesiedelung der Ghost towns – zu beiden Seiten der Grenze – ist jedoch ein deutlicher Indikator für diesen neuen demographischen Prozess.

**Keywords:** Amenity(-led) migration, demographic change, ghost towns, Alps

### 1 Motivation and research design

Research within the framework of a current project in the Italian Alps<sup>1)</sup> has shown not only a demographic reversal in this region but also indications

<sup>1)</sup> FWF-Project (P 20954-G03) “The Impact of Current Demographic Transformation on Ethno-Linguistic Minorities in the Italian Alps” (STEINICKE et al. 2010, 2011a, 2011b; WALDER et al. 2010).

of similar transformations in most parts of other demographic problem areas in the entire Alpine space: since the 1990s, more and more communities that suffered traditionally from depopulation have suddenly become in-migration areas. This new process has not been duly noted so far, and therefore the present study seeks to analyze its outcomes also beyond Italy by a comparison of the Alpine border areas between Italy and Slovenia. The objective is to highlight the new and surprising influx and to study

the origins and motivations of the newcomers and their effects on the demographic and socio-economic structures, as well as on the cultural landscape of the border communities.

The findings of the project “Counterurbanization in the Californian Sierra Nevada” (2003–2006), supported by the Austrian Science Fund (FWF), proved that there are demographic parallels between the Sierra Nevada and the Alps (HOFMANN and STEINICKE 2004; LÖFFLER and STEINICKE 2004, 2006, 2007): correspondingly, in parts of the Alps we can find in-migration not only in some major valleys and tourism-intensive areas, but also and specifically in remote, high-altitude regions. This particular migration leads to population gains and is the main reason for the recovery and extension of communities in these peripheral areas. Furthermore, it is responsible for the revitalization of settlements and of some economic branches there.

Although it is essential for the communities, regions, and states to be aware of the current demographic changes, such studies, as mentioned before, are rare in the Alps; the Slovenian part has been omitted from the research entirely. Depopulation areas in the Alps as presented by BÄTZING (2002, 2005) no longer reflect the actual situation.

A fair amount of academic literature refers to demographic criteria, mainly to general population developments in the Alps (e.g. MESSERLI and SANCHIS 1996; VAROTTO and PSENNER 2003; FASSMANN and VORAUER-MISCHER 2005), but only few studies – apart from the aforementioned project results and the new contribution of BENDER and KANITSCHIEDER (2012) – describe the latest migration processes and phenomena. Even BÄTZING, who has specialized in demographic and socio-economic transformations in the Alps (BÄTZING et al. 1996; BÄTZING 2005; BÄTZING 2011), has not taken the in-migration tendency into account, while PERLIK (2006, 2008; PERLIK et al. 2001) focuses primarily on “peri-urban” (i.e. suburban) areas in the Alps.

Overall, the reference literature shows a lack of empirical contributions to the current demographic development as well as the comparative view of the re-development and re-discovery of remote Alpine regions and the effects on socio-economic conditions. Regarding the remarkable numbers of newcomers in the Italian Alps, it is not only logical but almost imperative to survey this new process in similar Alpine regions. The Friuli-Slovenian border area seems therefore to be an appropriate first step because it enables comparison of the current demographic tendencies in two states but nonetheless in

one mountain massif – the Julian (Pre-)Alps, which are divided by an international border.

Considering the current status of research, the contribution presented here builds on the following major thesis which represents the core issues the study seeks to address:

Even in the peripheral, traditional emigration areas along the Alpine Italian-Slovenian border a demographic turnaround is identifiable. The driving force behind it is amenity migration, and the arrival of newcomers has led to remarkable revitalization of settlements and land use as well as the local economy. Ghost towns are therefore being resettled.

Before discussing the specific research objectives, it seems reasonable to present the amenity(-led) migration approach<sup>2)</sup> and some important findings of new demographic tendencies in the Italian Alps. This allows an understanding of the current population processes along the Alpine Italian-Slovenian border.

## 2 Underlying concept: amenity migration

The phenomenon of amenity migration constitutes a relatively new field of research. It builds on the model of counterurbanization (BERRY 1976), which describes the rediscovery and re-evaluation of rural areas as residential and commercial space. In the years 2006 MOSS – one of the pioneers in the field of amenity migration research – and 2009 MOSS et al. published two fundamental anthologies on the subject, in which numerous experts discuss these occurrences in various mountain regions all over the world (see also GOSNELL and ABRAMS 2011 and MCINTYRE 2009b; 2011). Amenity-led migration represents a shift in preference of residential location from the urban space to remote but attractive rural (mountainous) regions, where it is the driving force behind current settlement expansions and population growth. Weekend and leisure residences have become increasingly second or retirement homes, which means that the time spent in the target area expands significantly. As more and more people are no longer confined to their places of work, the motivation to also transfer work-related aspects to the

<sup>2)</sup> To be precise, the term “amenity migration” is not entirely correct. Discussions within the Banff Conference (MOSS et al. 2009) clarified that it is only a common term in English. It should also be emphasized here that in the strictest sense of the word amenity “migration” may not be a real migration because it does not in every case involve a permanent change of residence.

“new” residence is high. Further reasons for this turnaround are improved infrastructures in terms of telecommunication, traffic and supply, as well as affordable real estate and intensive leisure activities. Amenity migrants intend to settle in their destinations permanently, seasonally (one or more periods per year), or intermittently (moving between their residences more frequently). Seasonal or intermittent presence on site, however, also includes for instance second home owners or “multiple dwelling” (MCINTYRE 2009a). Tourism, by contrast, is not seen as a part of amenity migration. Tourists typically visit without the intention to reside or earn a living at their destinations. Nevertheless, tourism plays an important role because it could be seen not only as a stepping stone to amenity migration but also as its supporter and facilitator (PRICE et al. 1997).

Here is not the place to discuss all the amenity-led migration concepts as well as new studies on migratory processes in the Alps outside Italy and Slovenia (cf. *Revue de géographie alpine*, vol. 99/1, 2011 containing among other the theoretically oriented contribution of PERLIK). For the scope of the present study it will suffice to quote a few examples.

In the Italian Alps, FERRARIO (2009) studies the agricultural decline and the associated transformation of the former “rural landscape” towards a “leisure landscape.” She thereby examines the consequences of this functional change due to the new landscape utilization, especially by amenity migrants. CORRADO (2010) discusses the new residents in the Italian Alps, and STEINICKE et al. (2010, 2011a) focus on the impacts of amenity migration, especially on the influence on ethno-linguistic minorities there. Both provide an extensive list of literature on the topic.

Most of the new arrivals represent “urban refugees” from outside the Alpine region.<sup>3)</sup> On the other hand, newcomers are also work- or leisure oriented re-migrants, retirees, second home owners, guest workers from abroad and other non-natives, whereby each of them could be an amenity migrant (Fig. 1).

In the Slovenian part of the Alps, GOSAR and ROBLEK (2001) investigate tourism, tourism-oriented second homes, and regional development,

<sup>3)</sup> It should be noted that into the 1980s the tendency of the (northern) Italian urban population to move into rural areas took place not so much through relocation into suburbia than by the construction of recreational homes in attractive locations (ANDREOTTI et al. 2005, 18f). The conversion of these into second homes (in the Alps) was therefore uncomplicated, certainly simplifying the emergence of “amenity settlements.”

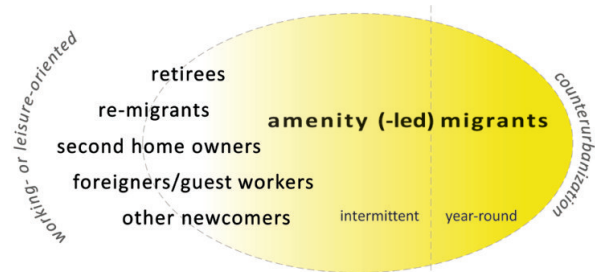


Fig. 1: Different types of amenity migrants. STEINICKE et al. 2010, 2011a, 2011b; WALDER et al. 2010; compiled and represented by the authors

and RAVBAR (2004) examines settlement structures and settlement development, but neither putting the amenity settlement dimension in the center of their considerations yet. This is also valid for the Slovenian-Italian cross-border and Slovenian border studies (e.g., BUFON 2003; GOSAR 2005, 2009).

There is no doubt, the approach of amenity migration is an appropriate focal point to study the newcomers in the Alps. This is all the more relevant, as the specific literature since the late 1990s has typically included the multi-resident/dwelling aspect (PRICE et al. 1997).

The concept of multilocality overcomes the insufficient meaning of the terms “second” or “recreational homes,” which are either statistically defined or carry a tourism connotation. Thus, in order to analyze the full spectrum of “inhabitants for a time” in regard to their individual motivations and functions as well as their participation in the community, the integration of the multilocality approach opens up a new possibility to develop a more accurate definition for amenity migrants in the European Alps. According to recent findings, multilocality is not a subform of migration, but a third component between migration and daily circulation (HILTI 2009, 84; WEICHHART 2009, 7). Overall, the studies of MOSS (2006), MOSS et al. (2009), ROLSHOVEN (2007), MCINTYRE (2009a), MCINTYRE et al. (2006), HILTI (2009), and WEICHHART (2009) show that further research is essential to widen the perspective and to integrate the concept of “multiple dwelling.”

### 3 Research results in the Italian Alps and in the alpine Italian-Slovenian border area

This study is based on the one hand on analysis of the current state of the art as well as on own analyses of official statistical data. It is on the other hand derived from own surveys in the course of investigative visits to all Alpine communities along

the Italian and Slovenian border (2011/12). In these remote areas 64 locals and newcomers were interviewed personally (partly structured interview) about current population processes in the respective region. In addition, written surveys were conducted with all communities. The standardized questionnaires containing pre-provided response options were sent both by traditional mail and by e-mail. Further techniques for data acquisition were the analysis of aerial photographs and remote-sensing images of the research area as well as function and land-use mapping. Qualitative, empirical field work was applied to verify the results of the statistical interpretation, since the census data do not always reflect the actual situation. Since the use of new techniques like the integration of social media has worked well in the Italian project, it was a logical component to also integrate into the present study. With this tool it was possible to locate newcomers, to stay in contact, to interact with them, and to build a network. As mentioned in chapter 2, a well-developed telecommunications network is an important precondition for most amenity migrants to move to remote mountainous regions.

### 3.1 Italian Alps: current demographic tendencies

In the Italian Alps, except in South Tyrol, adverse natural and socio-agrarian factors, as well as a lack of non-agricultural job opportunities, led to a massive depopulation that lasted well into the 1970s (STEINICKE 1991). Figure 2 seeks to illustrate this out-migration period which has led to the development of completely abandoned settlements (“ghost towns;” ČEDE and STEINICKE 2007).

Within the framework of the amenity migration project referred to at the beginning, WALDER et al. (2010) and STEINICKE et al. (2010, 2011a) could demonstrate, however, that from 1990 onwards the population in the majority of the Italian Alpine communities has grown because of in-migration. Even peripherally located areas have progressively accomplished a positive migration balance since the 1990s (Fig. 3–5). Regardless, the effects of unfavorable bio-demographic factors (birth deficits) resulting from the out-migration period can still be observed in many mountain communities. But for the first time more and more municipalities in the Italian Alps that were characterized by population losses in the last decades now show in part remarka-

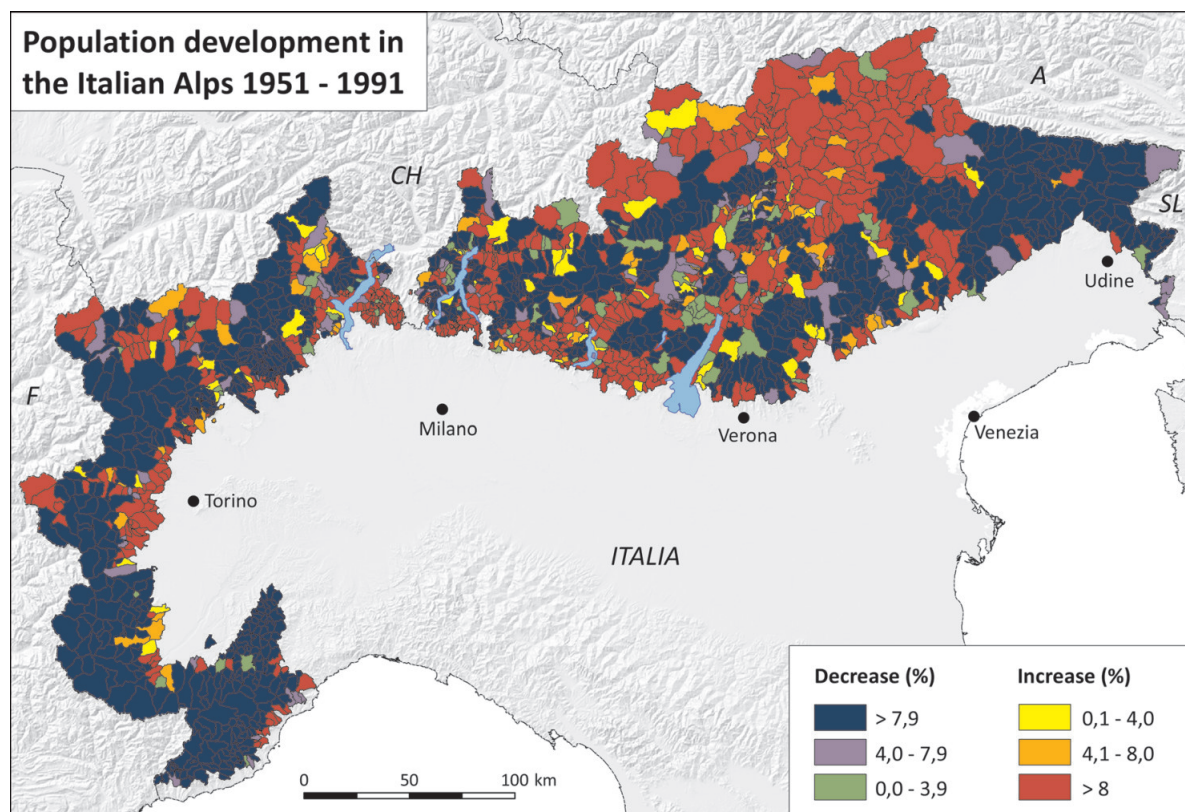


Fig. 2: Population development in the Italian Alps 1951–1991. Source: ISTAT, calculations and representation by the authors

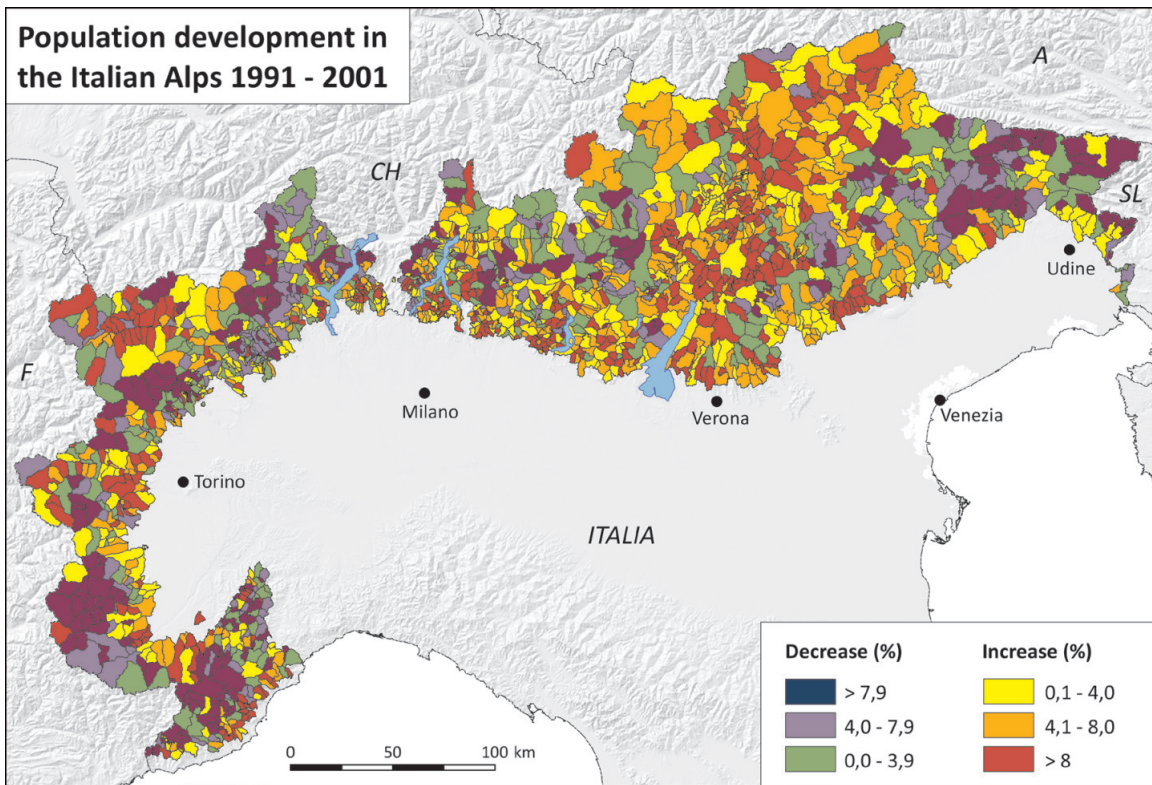


Fig. 3: Population development in the Italian Alps 1991–2001. Source: ISTAT, calculations and representation by the authors

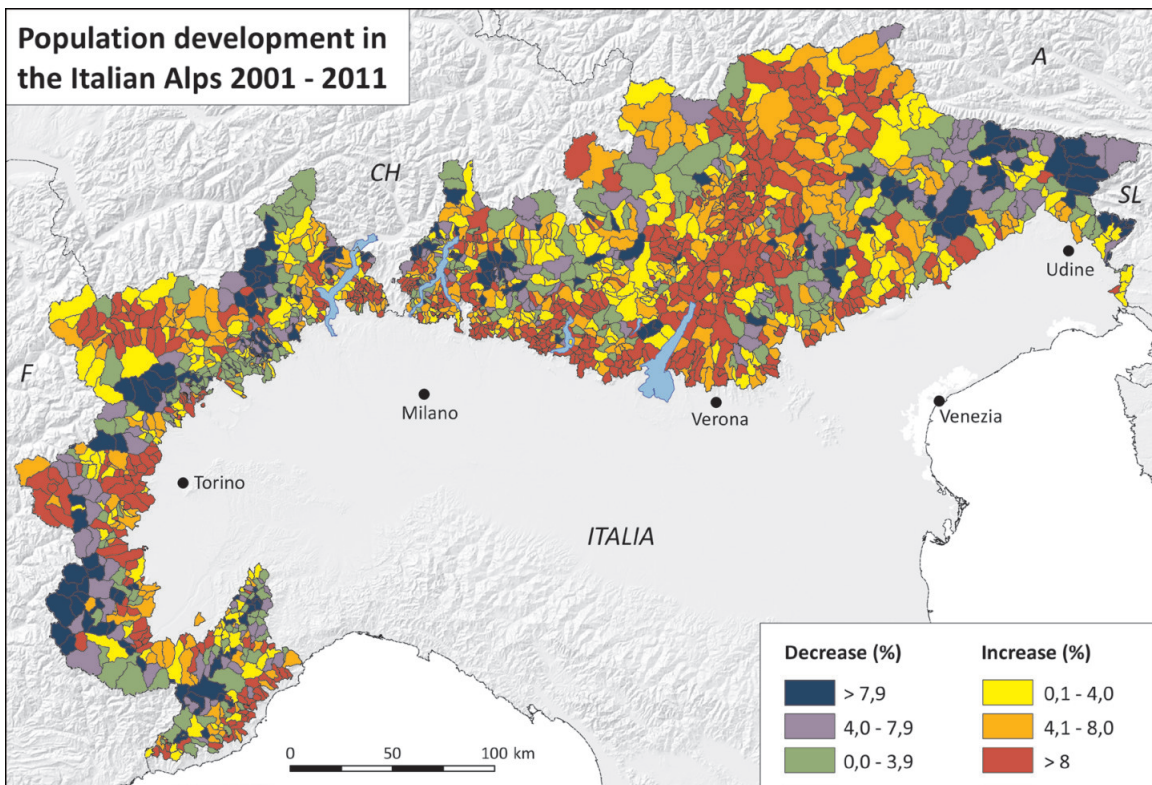


Fig. 4: Population development in the Italian Alps 2001–2011. Source: ISTAT, calculations and representation by the authors

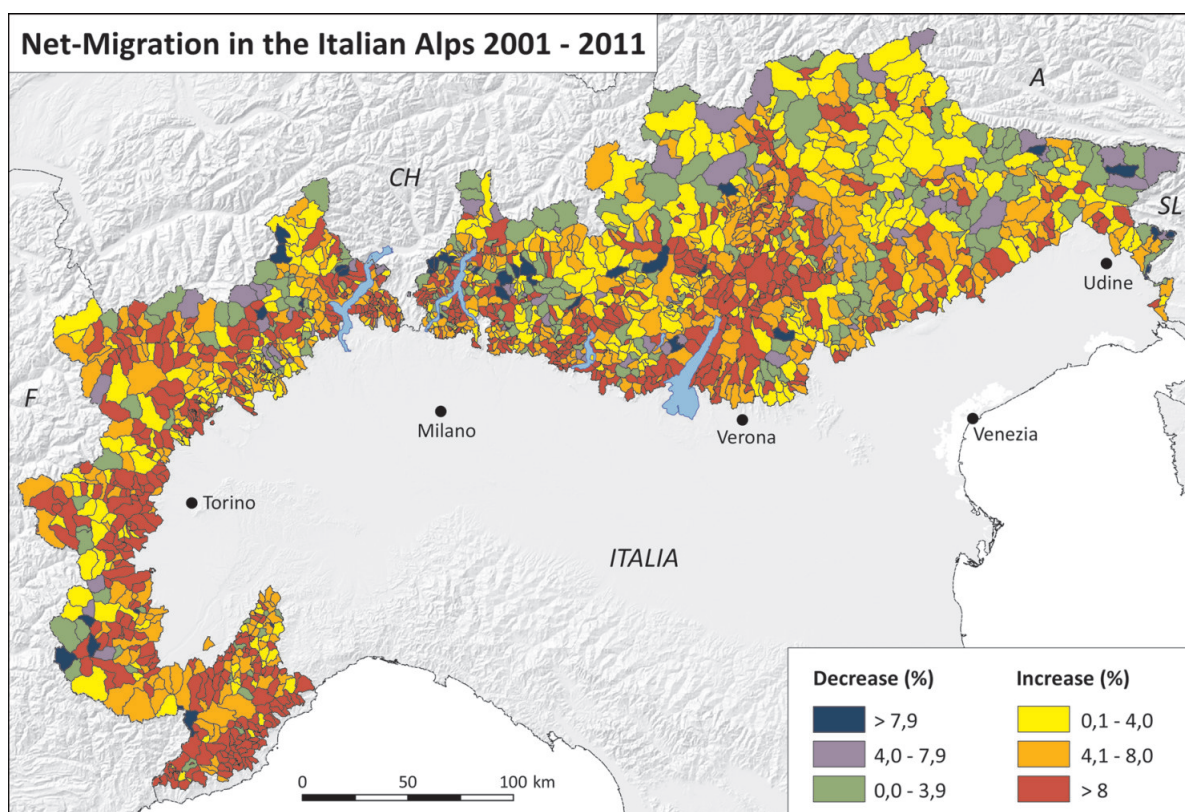


Fig. 5: Migration balance in the Italian Alps 2001–2011. Source: ISTAT, calculations and representation by the authors

ble influx and population gains, with approximately 33,000 net in-migrants per year since 2001.

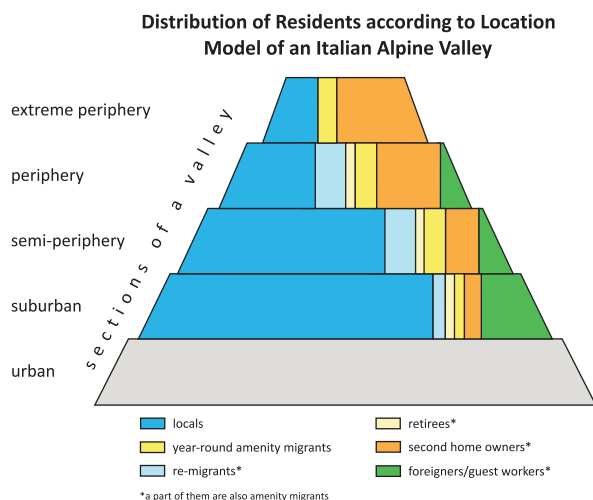
Viewing important research results of the aforementioned project, the model in figure 6 shows that the percentage of newcomers is small in the foothills or in the lower parts of a valley. The population gains there can be explained through suburbanization or exurbanization (with daily commuting). In the interior of the “Italian model valley,” specifically in the former depopulation areas of the peripheral zone, “urban refugees” have not only led to stabilization or even revitalization of local structures but constitute also the majority of the population.

### 3.2 Population development in the Alpine Italian-Slovenian border area

The special demographic situation in the northeastern part of Italy (Fig. 2–5) requires a closer look at this border region. The study area includes therefore the Alpine communities on both sides of the border between Italy and Slovenia, and thus encompasses parts of both the Julian Alps and the Julian Prealps.

The natural factors disfavoring the Julian high mountains (rugged terrain, large relief energy, high precipitation with heavy rain in the autumn, deep progression of the vegetation boundaries contingent with climate) disadvantage especially the Italian part (STEINICKE 1991, 56–58). Socio-economic difficulties also affect the Italian border communities to a greater degree (ČEDE and STEINICKE 2007).

In the Slovenian border area the economic weakness is less apparent, not least through the successful tourist valorization of the attractive Soča Valley and the nearby Triglav National Park since the independence of Slovenia from 1991 onward. Nonetheless, the mountainous part of the administrative region of Goriška on both sides of the Soča is also a distinctly peripheral area. This is characterized in Slovenian studies with statements such as “demographically especially endangered zone” (GOSAR and ROBLEK 2001, 144) or “dying out of population has become even more intensive, e.g. in the Tolmin region” (RAVBAR and KLEMENČIČ 1993, 150), even though the depopulation is not as far advanced as in the Italian border communities in the east of the Friulian mountains (Montagna friulana).



**Fig. 6: Distribution of residents according to location and exposition – model of an Italian Alpine Valley.** STEINICKE et al. 2010, 2011a, 2011b; WALDER et al. 2010; compiled and represented by the authors

### 3.2.1 Effects of depopulation on the cultural landscape

The eastern part of the *Montagna friulana* suffered the heaviest population losses of the Alps between WWII and 1990 (Fig. 2). In this period depopulation in the Slovene study area was by far not as distinctive as in the neighboring Italian communities. Typical for the entire study area are the birth deficits, detectable since 1960, which continue to intensify to the present, both in the Italian and the Slovenian part. Thus, it is the currents of migration that lessen the unfavorable bio-demographic processes (ISTAT 1953ff.; STATISTIČNI URAD REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE 1953ff.; ADAMIČ et al. 1995, 636–637).

The high intensity of population decline in the Italian part of the study area is reflected in all border communities in the advanced decay of the cultural landscape. Upon closer inspection of the regression processes, the terms “permanently” and “entirely” abandoned settlements (BORN 1979) can only be used with restriction, although ghost towns, particularly in the community Chiusaforte (ČEDE and STEINICKE 2007, 98–99), make the extent of the depopulation very obvious (Fig. 7). This is mainly attributable to the effects of the earthquake of 1976, which left traces still visible many years later in completely destroyed villages.

Compared with the Italian border municipalities, the decline of the Alpine cultural landscape in the Slovenian part of the investigation area is not nearly as pronounced, not least due to a decentralized regional and economic policy as it was forcefully

pursued in the socialist Yugoslavia. Official statistics and own field studies in the Slovenian border communities now revealed only one [still] totally abandoned village (“ghost town”): Lisec in the municipality of Tolmin.

Contrary to the Alpine peripheral regions in the neighboring Carinthia (ČEDE 1991, 2011), it becomes apparent in both the Italian and the Slovenian part of the study area that the agricultural areas no longer cultivated are not being reforested but rather left bare. This may be attributable to the unfavorable natural environment, but also to the extremely low proportion of population with agricultural disposition. The cultural landscape on both sides of the national border is therefore marked by neglect and bush encroachment.

### 3.2.2 Demographic turnaround

#### *Initial Phase 1991–2001*

For the first time in the whole *Montagna friulana*, in-migration was more numerous than out-migration in this period. In most Italian communities near the border with Slovenia, however, the migration balance between 1991 and 2001, as well as the population development, continued negatively (ISTAT 1991ff). Nevertheless, as early as in the 1980s mostly retired migrant workers returned to their mountain villages in the Italian part of the study area. This movement developed also out of the highly subsidized reconstruction after the earthquake catastrophe of 1976 (STEINICKE 1991, 120–129). With the renovation of the villages, now largely completed, the habitable space increased so extensively that it provided a considerable pull factor for a return after retirement. As a result of the basic bio-demographic situation, the general increase in life expectancy, but also the aforementioned re-migration, most communities in the Alpine border region to Slovenia additionally developed between 1991 and 2001 increasingly into “senior communities” (ČEDE and STEINICKE 2007, 95).

The Slovenian part of the study area continued to experience population losses between 1991 and 2001, but first signs of a turnaround were detectable thanks to the positive migration balance in the municipalities of Bovec and Kranjska Gora (STATISTIČNI URAD REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE 1992ff). Compared with the “senior villages” in the Italian border communities, however, the share of the immigrant working population was higher in the

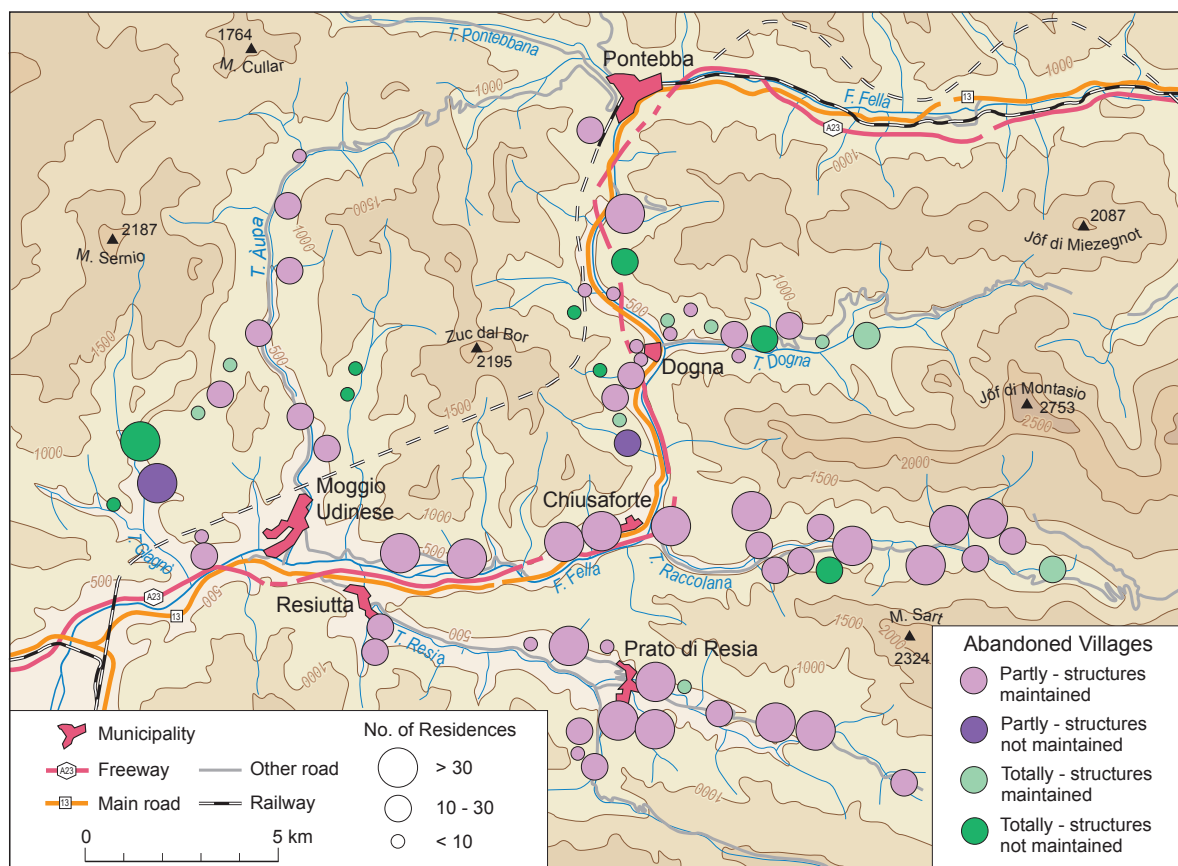


Fig. 7: Partially and totally abandoned settlements in the Canal di Ferro 2005 (east Friulian mountains). Source: ČEDE and STEINICKE (2007, 98)

upper Soča and Sava river valley, not least because of the strong development of tourism since the independence of Slovenia. Unlike the Italian settlements in the border area, immigrants in the Slovenian part focused much more on the main towns of the municipalities that had experienced a strong upgrading during the socialist period.

#### *Amenity Migration from 2001 onward*

Inquiries in the investigation area as well as written surveys targeting all the communities showed that for more than a decade, in addition to the remigrants, members of younger age groups have also immigrated. There is awareness in the communities that this is a completely new phenomenon and that the “new highlanders” originate from the larger towns of the region. Nevertheless, between 2001 and 2011 this tendency could not evoke population growth, either in the Slovene border municipalities or in the Italian part of the study area (Fig. 8a, 8b).

Because of continuing population outflow, these “new highlanders” are hardly evident in the muni-

pal migration balances (Tab. 1). In this sense the investigation area, in comparison with most parts of the Italian Alps, appears as a persistent area in which the old pattern of depopulation still dominates. In the Italian border region, only the Julian Prealps communities Lusevera and Taipana recorded statistically tangible net immigration since 2001 (Fig. 5). Nevertheless, in recent times the newcomers have become an important factor in the decentralized population distribution, particularly in the scenically attractive, peripherally situated settlements. In neighboring Slovenia the municipality of Bovec, despite population losses, has already become an immigration community since the 1990s.

#### **4 Case studies: amenity migration into abandoned villages**

The new demographic process of amenity migration and its impacts within the study area are particularly evident in the former ghost towns and the partially abandoned settlements.



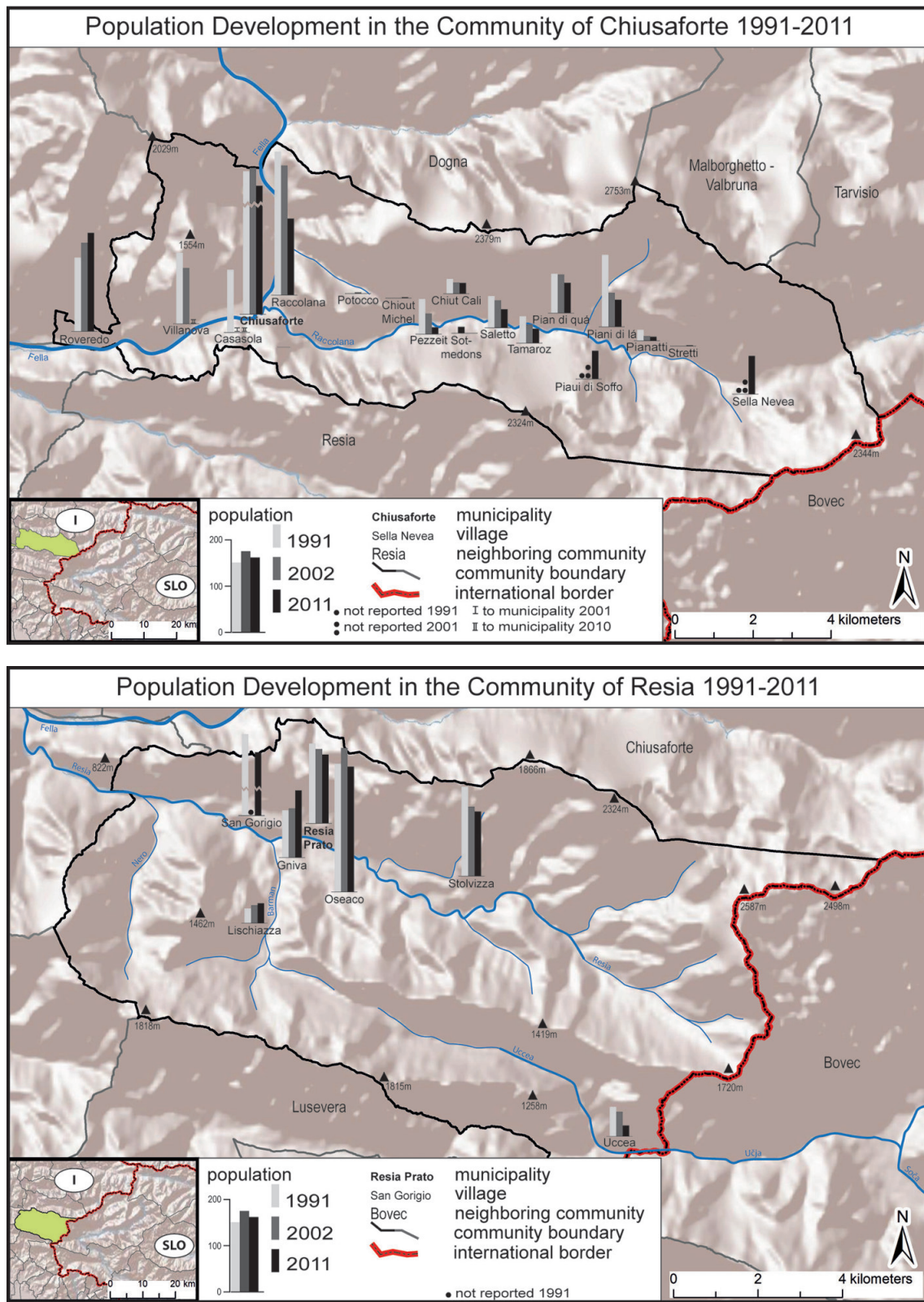


Fig. 8a: Population development in Alpine border communities of Italy 2001–2011. Source: ISTAT (2002ff.); calculations and representation by the authors

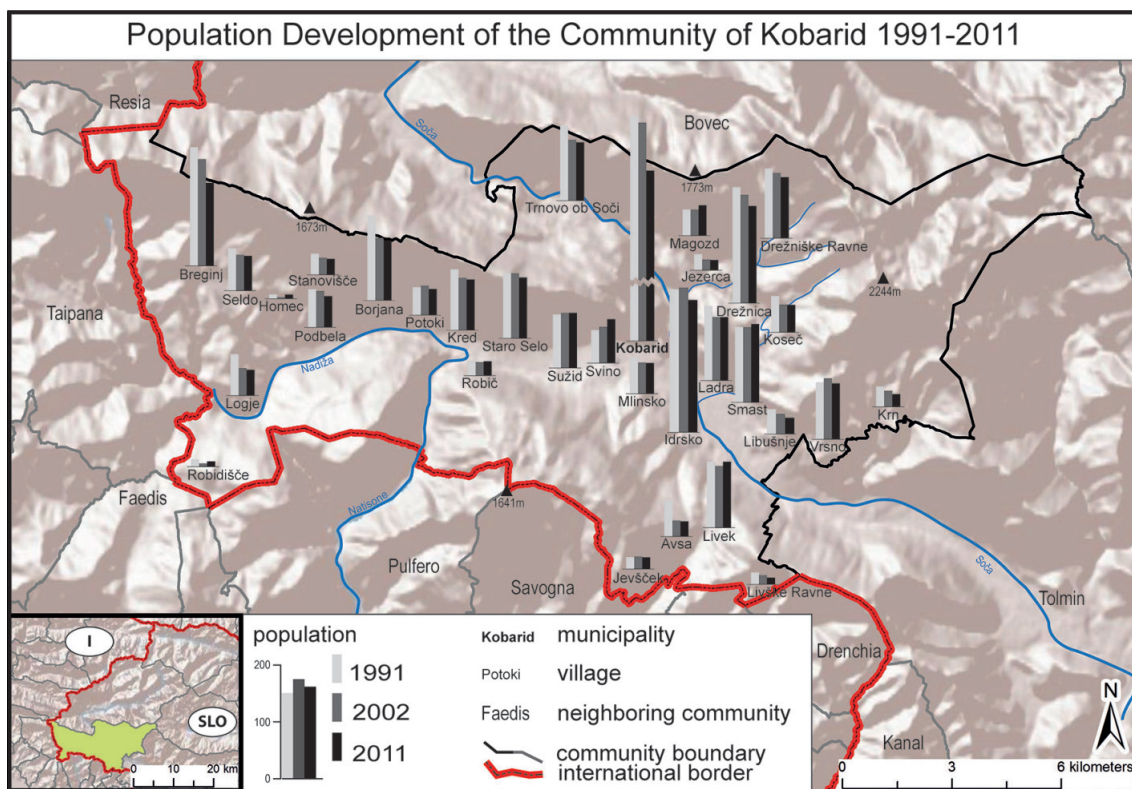
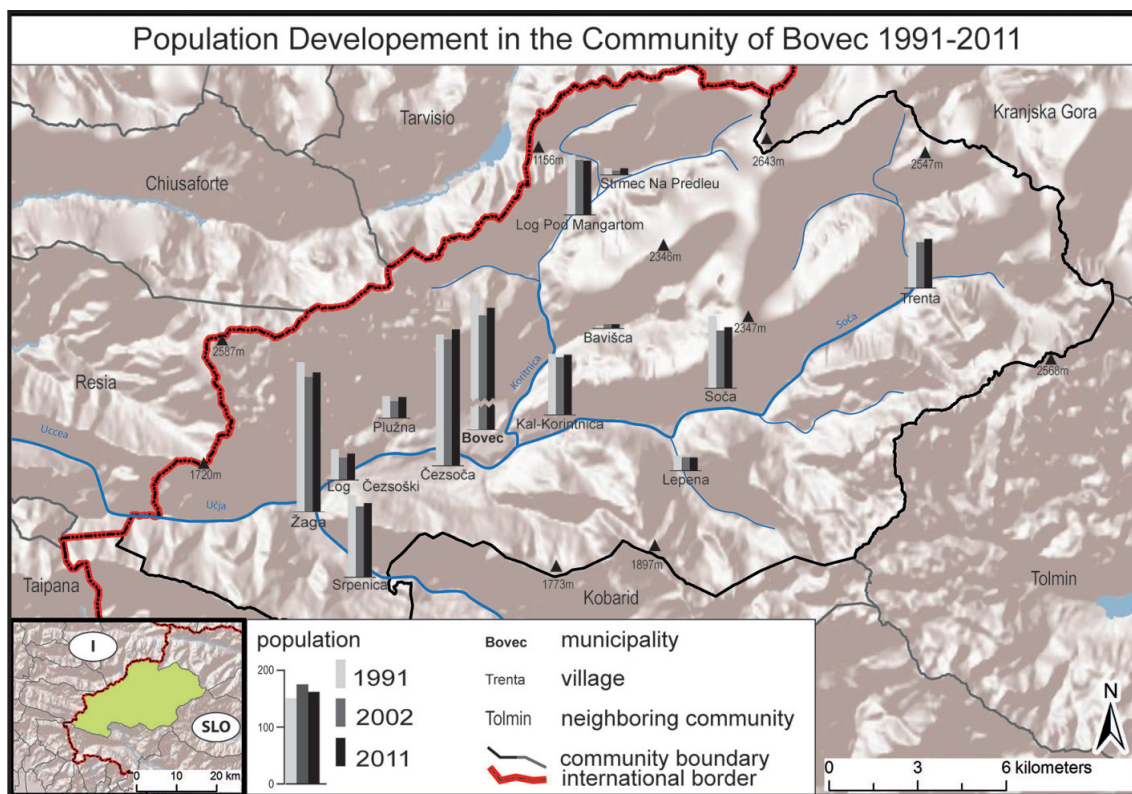


Fig. 8b: Population development in Alpine border communities of Slovenia 2001–2011. Source: STATISTIČNI URAD REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE (2002ff.); calculations and representation by the authors

**Tab. 1: Net-migration in the Alpine border communities of Italy (2002–2011) and Slovenia (2001–2011)**

Italy	Pop.	Slovenia	Pop.
Tarvisio	-249	Kranjska Gora	-1
Chiusaforte	-39	Bovec	139
Resia	-42	Kobarid	-76
Lusevera	10	Tolmin	-143
Taipana	60	Kanal	-308
Pulfero	-28		
Savogna	-72		
Grimacco	-21		
Drenchia	-11		
Stregna	-11		
Prepotto	-32		

Source: ISTAT (2003ff.); STATISTIČNI URAD REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE (2002ff.); calculations and representation by the authors

Known in part from previous research (ČEDE and STEINICKE 2007), the two Friulian settlements Chiòut Michel and Patòc (Municipality of Chiusaforte) and the Slovenian village Robidišče (Municipality of Kobarid) were subject of case studies for this purpose (Fig. 9a, 9b). In 1921 the two neighboring Friulian villages had a combined population of close to 200; after World War II Patòc counted 122 residents and Chiòut Michel 29. In 1988, however, both had been completely depopulated (STEINICKE 1991, 119). Robidišče still had 100 inhabitants after WWII; the 2002 census enumerated only seven (STATISTIČNI URAD REPUBLIKE SLOVENIJE (1953ff.)). Nevertheless, in all three examples the villages showed a remarkable population increase in recent years during the summer months: in 2011 the authors recorded 41 occupants in Patòc, 13 in Chiòut Michel, and 32 in Robidišče. Notwithstanding, the census does not reflect these seasonal growths in population.

On the one hand the new villagers are composed of older re-migrants – senior citizens who often still have a residence in the main town –, on the other hand of amenity migrants who are slightly younger and can also be considered multi-local dwellers. According to our surveys these newcomers originate from Trieste, Udine, Gorizia, Nova Gorica, Koper and Ljubljana where they also earn their livelihood and spend the winters. In general, they visit their workplace twice per week during the warmer months. With the exception of one family with pre-school aged children, the amenity migrants in the case study area are all over 40 years old.

Unlike our research results in the Californian Sierra Nevada (LÖFFLER and STEINICKE 2007) revealed, in the study areas – as in most parts of the Italian Alps (STEINICKE et al 2010) – newcomers are on average not in the highest, but in medium income brackets; they are found predominantly in the so-called middle and upper middle-class. In Robidišče, all newcomers are winner of the Slovenian transformation process, and a second home in the mountains is admittedly linked to social prestige. By contrast, in the Italian part second homes have a more long-standing tradition (see footnote 4).

The pull factors for in-migration to high mountains are similar to those WALDER et al (2010) explored in other parts of the Alps. Our respondents in both Robidišče and Patòc/Chiòut Michel named the natural and recreational amenities and the relatively low cost of housing as prime reasons for moving to the high mountains. The relative remoteness of the dispersed settlements is not assessed negatively because modern telecommunications technology is adequately available. The comparatively poor options for access (especially in winter), however, are considered a disadvantage.

In the Slovenian study area, due to various political and socio-economic developments, a multi-year temporal delay of effects on spatial structures of the newcomers, compared to those of the Italian border communities, is apparent. Therefore in recent years, especially in the town of Kobarid, previously vacant homesteads or those left to decay have been physiognomically and functionally revitalized – in contrast to the Italian study area, where the process of structural renewal is already largely completed. Into a similar category falls the new construction activity caused by amenity migration, which is consistently more recent in the Slovenian municipalities than in the Italian border areas. In Robidišče all buildings with amenity migrants are newer than seven years.

The delayed development is particularly evident in a comparison of the case studies. While in the Italian Patòc and Chiòut Michel only few buildings stand empty or deteriorate, the share of inoperative housing sites or those exposed to decay is distinctly higher in the Slovenian Robidišče, often in direct vicinity of structures renewed in the course of amenity migration. In contrast to this, caused by the essentially complete deagriculturization in the Montagna friulana, in both Italian settlements the plots, with the exception of a small potato field, are no longer utilized agriculturally. More than in other parts of the Italian Alps, in northern Friuli the decline of agricultural landscape is at a particularly advanced

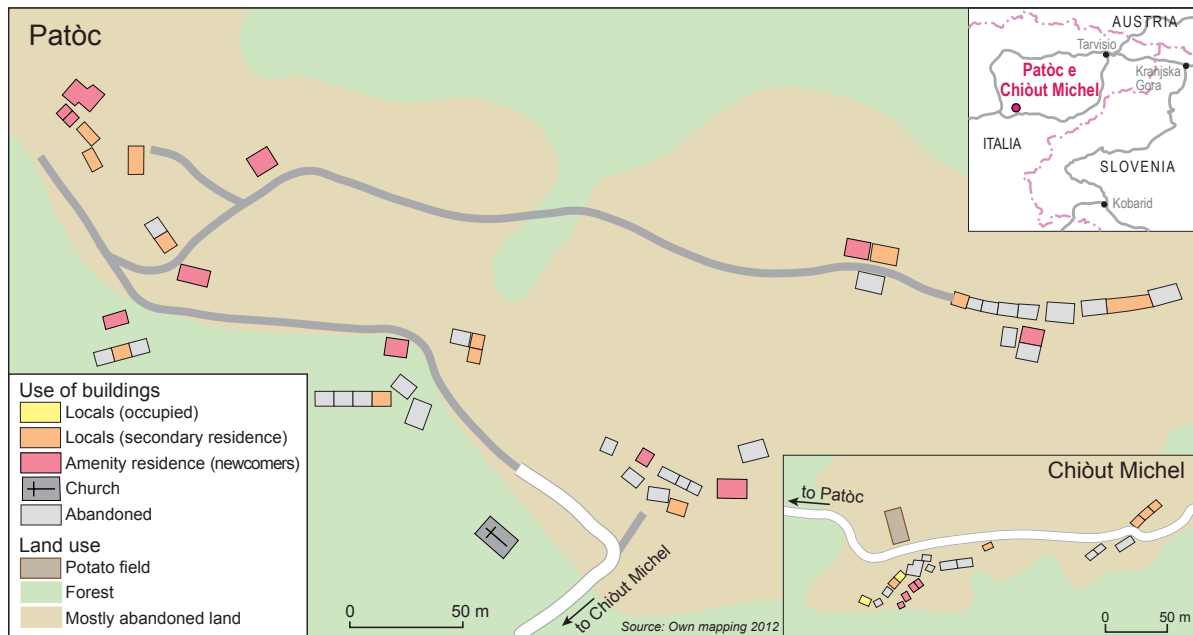


Fig. 9a: Case Study I: Land use and functions in Patòc and Chiòut Michel (Municipality of Chiusaforte, Italy). Source: Aerial photographs and mapping by the authors (2012)

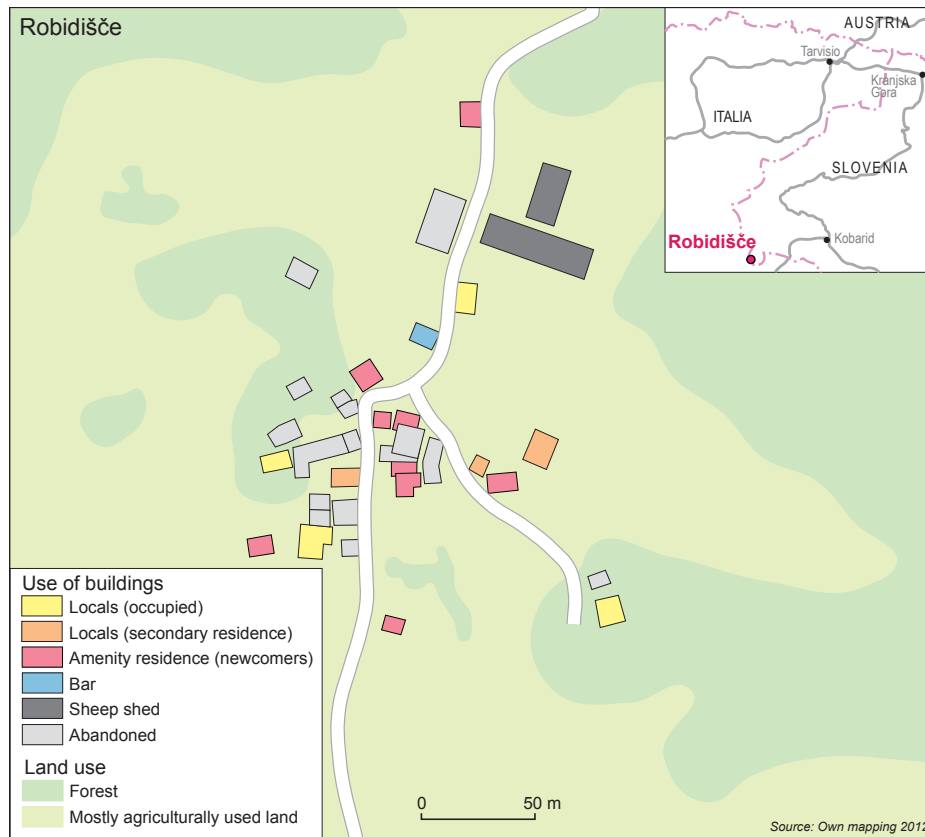


Fig. 9b: Case Study II: Land use and functions in Robidišče (Municipality of Kobarid, Slovenia). Source: Aerial photographs and mapping by the authors (2012)

stage. In-migrants – even those with an agrarian background – do not improve the land management. Occurrences of degradation and bush encroachment are therefore omnipresent.

In Robidišče, meanwhile, the usable agricultural spaces are mostly still cultivated.

Consequently, besides the chronologically varying onset of amenity migration, in both case studies differences between intensification and extensification processes in building substance and land use also become apparent.

Contrary to the situation in most parts of the Italian Alps, the economic influence of the newcomers in the cross-border zone of the case study is restricted predominantly to the regional construction industry. Other economic effects, apart from the intensive cultivation of the gardens, relate to a certain revival of local trade and gastronomy in the principal towns of the municipalities. In the Italian area no new jobs have yet been generated, but a reopening of bars is being considered. In Robidišče, however, a restaurant was opened two years ago, as well as a sheep stable. In addition, attempts are made to find new markets for the local cheese. The municipal surveys in the Slovenian part undeniably showed an association between newcomers and economic stimuli. If the statements of locals can be trusted, the amenity migrants have nevertheless not yet impacted the property prices.

## 5 Synthesis and conclusion

This study could show for the first time that the characteristic in-migration around the last two decades in large parts of the Italian Alps, accompanied by population growth, is beginning, somewhat delayed, in the Alpine Italian-Slovenian border area, thus becoming a demographic developmental factor. Nonetheless, in this Alpine peripheral area out-migration still causes the population to decrease. Here, too, the process of amenity migration brings more and more newcomers into the mountains, but in the overall migration balance they are only slightly noticeable. The results of our research, however, do not suggest a modification of the leading thesis, formulated in chapter 1, about a demographic turnaround in the study area. In empirical terms we could confirm the new in-migration process, its spreading from the Western to the Eastern Alps, and its effects on socio-economic structures. These findings represent an essential prerequisite for any subsequent conceptual research (e.g. on “multi-locale dwelling”).

Ghost towns as an obvious feature of settlement regression processes in the Italian border regions, as they were mappable only ten years ago, can now only be identified in isolated cases. As a result of decentralized regional and economic policies in the socialist Yugoslavia, the depopulation phase of villages in the Slovenian part of the study area was mitigated, and the population decline started with a temporal delay. At present, by the process of amenity migration that is meanwhile effective in the whole border area, an adjustment of development and structure takes place in the settlements of the Slovene municipalities situated adjacent to the Italian study area. This is also apparent in a comparison of the mapped case studies. Although in the Slovenian Robidišče many buildings currently are abandoned or are decaying, the architectural heritage is gradually renewed by newcomers and adjusted both in appearance and function to the already revitalized residences in the Italian Patòc and Chiout Michel. In the two case studies, as it is characteristic for the progression of amenity migration in peripheral Alpine areas, the middle and upper middle-class newcomers, whose impact upon the local economic structure is currently still low, originate from the urban and suburban areas of the regional centers.

Thus, the question of alternative uses for the architectural heritage of abandoned settlements (ghost towns) and those at risk of depopulation – relevant until recently specifically in the Italian part of the study area – has lost its importance (ČEDE and STEINICKE 2007, 101). Unconventional strategies to promote socio-economic development, such as asylum settlements, establishment of event- and fun tourism, or casino tourism, no longer have the same importance as only a few years ago.

It could also be proven that the current in-migration processes will not stop the decline of the agricultural landscape – neither in the Montagna friulana nor in other parts of the Italian Alps (with the exception of South Tyrol). In the Slovenian Alps, however, given the temporal delay of the depopulation phase the decay of the cultural landscape is less advanced.

The study highlights the west-east difference in the Alpine region in regard to the significance of the new in-migration for the current structural change in peripheral areas. Ensuing from the demographic turnaround in the French Alps starting in the mid-1980s (COY and STEINICKE 2006), the process of amenity migration spread across the Italian Alps, whereby the Cottian Alps, still threatened by population drain at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (BÄTZING

1990), are presently included in the transformation. Although a vast volume of academic literature still considers the Italian Alps (except South Tyrol) a huge depopulation area, the present study emphasizes that most municipalities in this region now show remarkable influx and thereby population gains.

Nowhere in the entire Alpine arc was the occurrence of depopulation between 1951 and 1991 as distinct as in the mountain areas of Friuli – and here particularly in the border areas toward Slovenia. It is therefore not surprising that here in the extreme east the traditional spatial structures still continue to exist. In contrast to the Cottian Alps the net migration has also remained largely negative. Nonetheless, the demographic reversal proclaims itself unmistakably in the Friulian border area, as well as in the adjacent Slovenian Alps. The disappearance of the totally abandoned settlements is a significant indicator for this tendency. The west-east proliferation of amenity migration has also extended onto the Slovenian side, but its effects are less apparent due to the weaker depopulation processes during the period of the Yugoslavian regime. Nevertheless, in both the Friulian and the Slovenian study area the newcomers' motivations behind the decision to move to the high mountains are natural and recreational amenities, relatively favorable housing costs, and the availability of modern telecommunications frameworks. Presumably, the demographic processes in the rest of the Slovenian Alps advance similar to the ones in the Soča area, most notably in the Bohinj as well as in the Pohor Mountains, but studies confirming this are still outstanding.

In the parts of the neighboring Austrian Alpine regions (Carinthia and Styria) that are structurally weak and plagued by demographic problems, however, the phenomenon of new in-migrants into the mountain areas is less significant. Causes are the low attractiveness of the ever more densely reforested and therefore not particularly diversified landscape, in the predominantly difficult-to-reach areas of dispersed settlements, as well as in farming estate structures that are hostile to innovation, and in large-scale land-holdings by non-farmers (ČEDE 2011).

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