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DERREG

**Developing Europe's Rural Regions
in the Era of Globalization**

**An interpretative model for better anticipating and responding to challenges
for regional development in an evolving international context**

WP 5

Deliverable 5.3

Case study report on Goriška and Pomurska (Slovenia)



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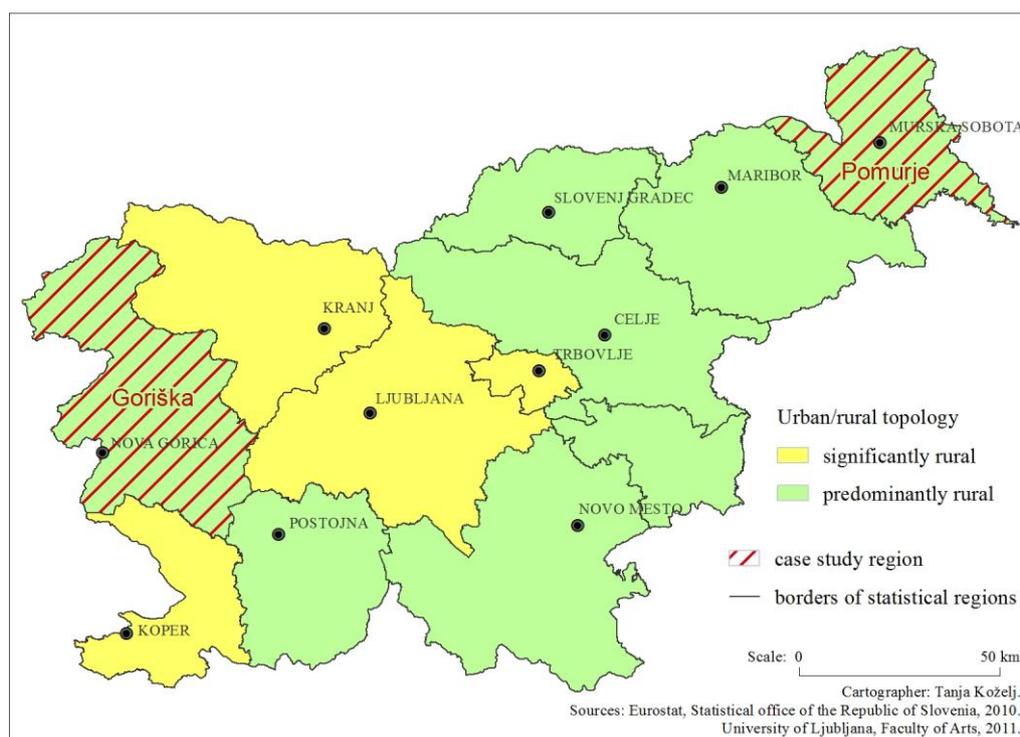
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1. Introduction

Globalization processes have restructured rural areas enormously: their impacts in European rural areas were studied in order to define the balance in opportunities and reality as well as threats. In Slovenia the study was conducted in two very different border rural regions with regard to their geographical features. For a more detailed study of the potential of environmental capital **(WP 3)** for the purposes of developing a peripheral rural area and of the factors and impacts of recent migration flows **(WP 2)** in Europe purposes, we turned to the Pomurje region. The study of the development of entrepreneurship in rural areas **(WP 1)** was carried out in the Goriška region, which traditionally is already closely linked with the international space.

Figure 1: Selected regions and urban/rural typology of Slovenia according to OECD methodology.



According to OECD methodology rural areas encompass the whole of the country territory, but the heterogeneity of the chosen regions can be seen by some basic comparisons at the national and regional levels.



Table 1: Some general characteristics of Slovenia, the Pomurje region and the Goriška region.

Indicator	Slovenia	Pomurje region	Goriška region
Total area (km ²) ¹	20,273	1,337.5	2,324.7
Population (2010) ¹	2,050,189	119,145	119,146
Population density ¹ (inhabitants/km ²)	101	89	51
Ageing index (2010) ¹	117.4	132.2	131.2
% of Natura 2000 areas (2010) ²	36.0	45.9	47.0
% of protected areas (2010) ²	9.4	35.7	39.5
% of agricultural land in use (ALU) (2010) ¹	23.5	48.2	12.6
Number of agricultural holdings (2010) ¹	74,517	8893	5772
% of employed persons (2010) ¹	36.0	26.6	33.4
% of self employed in agriculture (2010) ¹	3.8	13.3	4.0
Unemployment rate (2010) ¹	11.8	19.4	9.8
Number of enterprises (2009) ¹	160,931	6987	10,370
Gross domestic product per capita in EUR (2008) ¹	18,450	11,986	17,696
Total increase of population (in 2009) ¹	14,614	-661	21
% of foreigners from EU countries (2011) ¹	6.5	28.0	7.9

Source:

1 – SORS, 2011

2 – MESP, 2011

The Pomurje region is geographically composed of the fertile area of the Mura plain with abundant groundwater resources and agricultural land where consequently mostly conventional agriculture is practiced, with a higher population density, sufficient infrastructure etc. and of the hilly area of Goričko, Lendavske Gorice and a part of Slovenske Gorice, with a high biodiversity and preserved cultural landscape in which settlements are few and dispersed. Compared to other Slovenian regions, Pomurje, bordering Croatia, Hungary and Austria, is historically recognized as an underdeveloped region characterized by



outmigration. Although the economic relevance of agriculture in general is decreasing, the Pomurje region is still characterized as an **agricultural region** with the weakest economic power in Slovenia.

The Goriška region extends over the western part of Slovenia and is situated at the geographical crossroads of several regions: the Alpine, pre-Alpine, Karst-Dinaric and sub-Mediterranean. In general, the Goriška region is characterized by low population density and dispersed settlement, with Nova Gorica and its immediate vicinity as the only agglomeration area. The transborder character of the area is reflecting in the distribution of economic activities and population, migration flows, configuration of the development axis, etc. The “Goriška” section of the country’s border was one of the most open border area in the broader European context even before Slovenia integrated into the EU. This **strong interregional character** of the area has been a significant characteristic of regional development also since joining the EU in 2004.

The main benefit of the DERREG project is to advance existing scientific knowledge and produce practical recommendations for the rising ability of regional development strategies to cope with these new challenges. Research at the interdisciplinary scientific level has been enriched by the cooperation of national and local stakeholders in order to include their knowledge on regional development processes.

2. Methodology

The contribution of the research is twofold:

- **Theoretical-methodological;** a complex approach to the study of the latest processes and effects of globalization has required introducing a range of new approaches, the results of which contribute towards the establishment of new theoretical principles for interdisciplinary research.
- **Programmatic-planning;** through an analysis of the operation of various regional stakeholders and their networking, we have prepared a “good practice database”. Of essential importance are the final recommendations to policy-makers at the regional, national, and European levels, which are directed towards encouraging greater resilience of society and the economy to the coming changes in rural areas.



Table 2: Research phases in the selected regions.

	1 st phase			2 nd phase	3 rd phase	
environmental capital (Pomurje)	data base set up, literature review	national and regional documentation analysis	media analysis (Vestnik 2000 and 2008)	qualitative interviews with regional stakeholders	identification and analysis of good practices	good practice database, web resource centre, conclusions and policy recommendations
amenity migration (Pomurje)	data base set up, literature review			qualitative interviews with foreign home owners	identification and analysis of good practices	
rural business (Goriška)	data base set up, literature review		e-survey	qualitative interviews with firm managers	identification and analysis of good practices and network brokers	
regional comparison (Pomurje, Goriška)	data base comparison, regional workshops, contextual reports					

For the research approach in **environmental capital investigation**, the five main steps were already defined in the project initial phase and were followed throughout the entire project. The review of literature and statistical data, focusing on various components of environmental capital (i.e. water, land and soil, air, energy sources and use, biodiversity, protected areas, waste management etc.) was supported by the “media analysis”, in which articles on environmental issues in the newspaper Vestnik were reviewed. The main objective was to compare the contents in the year 2000 and 2008, assessing the presence of the various topics as well as the approach in presentation. The results provided a basis for the selection of regional stakeholders to be included in the third research step. The aim of the qualitative interviews (15) was to define the region’s main environmental advantages as well as problems as seen by regional developers. Based on the results from the previous steps, the research was focused on two main regional issues –**protected areas and**



sustainable tourism development. Therefore, the fourth step involved the definition of best practices (9) from these two fields.

Amenity migration is a new phenomenon in the Slovenian rural space. Detailed demographic analyses with a focus on the migration dynamics of the region formed the basis for our empirical investigation. Due to the high share of EU foreigners in Pomurje, we focused our work on qualitative interviews (13) with foreign home owners. The aim was to identify the profile of amenity migrants, their reasons for coming, and their personal experiences in the region with the local population and legal procedures. The experiences described and especially the obstacles to their integration formed the basis for the identification of the responsible institutions for promoting and facilitating regional engagement of international migrants.

In the era of globalization, **small firms located in rural areas in particular are extremely fragile** (Klemenčič, Lampič, Potočnik Slavič 2008). Evolving DERREG methodology is focused on **addressing globalization processes in rural business development.** After a detailed review of the relevant literature, we have provided a profile of business structures in the case study region based on explicit statistical data at the NUTS 3 level. Numerous statistical data indicated a **shortage of small and medium-sized enterprises in the Goriška region.** Also using the database provided by the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, we enlisted approx. 100 firms that would address the objectives of our research: SMEs with international contacts and SMEs reflecting representative regional structure by sectors. The analytical part was supplemented with the selection of a representative sample of firms (20) that were included in an electronic survey. The latter was amongst others focused on investigating how rural businesses derive strength from being part of a small, supportive business community, or from other aspects of their local business environment (such as close links to local institutions and agencies). In-depth explanations were provided by face to face structured interviews (8) with firm managers willing to cooperate. For a contextual analysis of the wider business environment, interviews with actors responsible for business development (6) were conducted.

The regional comparison synthesizes the findings from all included studies, summarized in contextual reports for each case study region, good practice platform (including practices from all included case study regions) and policy recommendations for policy makers which can potentially be implemented at the regional, national and EU levels.



3. Selected impacts of globalization in the Pomurje and Goriška regions

Environmental capital represents the major potential of the Pomurje region for development based on conservation and sustainable use of environmental resources. The importance of environmental capital can be seen through the statistical data and is also recognized through the regional media, the opinion of main regional stakeholders (i.e. the representatives of regional development agencies, regional forest management service) and in the local population's opinion – they are very proud of the preserved natural environment and also of their tradition and cultural heritage.

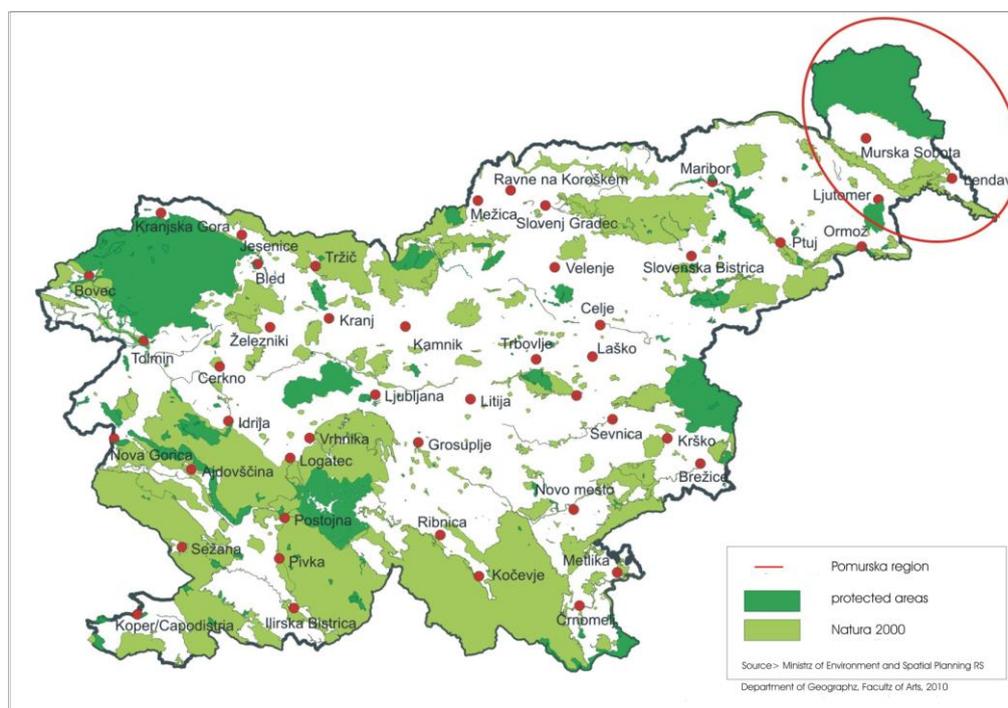
The percentage of protected areas according to IUCN categories (35.6%) and areas of Natura 2000 (45.9%) in Pomurje clearly indicates the good condition of the region's environment on the one hand but on the other hand it also reflects the response to the environmental threats in the region. The two preservation forms are mostly overlapping, but the regimes are different and combined, and potentially help in nature preservation. The numbers are significantly higher compared to the national level in the case of protected areas and also higher in the case of Natura 2000 areas.

Table 3: Protected areas and areas of Natura 2000 in Slovenia and Pomurje.

	Slovenia			Pomurje statistical region		
type of protected area	number	area	% of national territory	number	area	% of regional territory
national park	1	838 km ²	4.1	-	-	-
regional park	3	418 km ²	2.1	-	-	-
landscape park	44	646 km ²	5.0	3	478 km ²	34.5
Natura 2000		7298 km ²	36		614 km ²	45.9

Source: MESP, 2011.

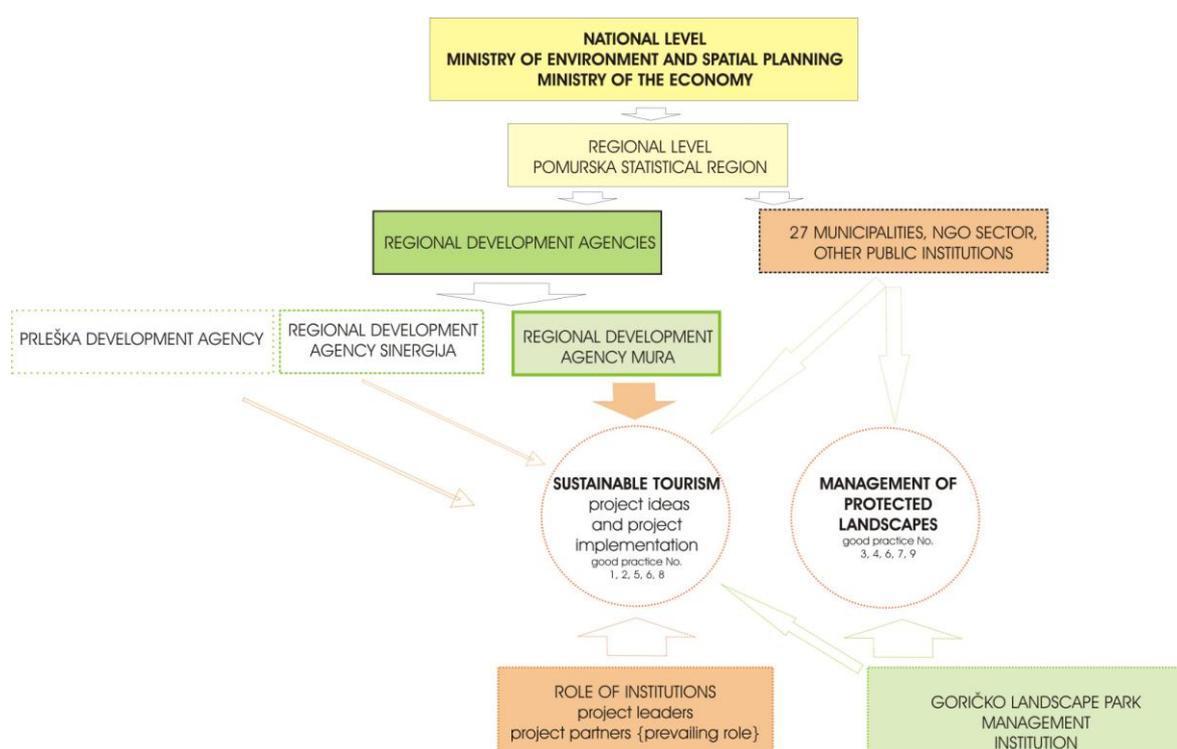
Figure 2: The protected areas and areas Natura 2000 in Slovenia.



The high percentage of Natura 2000 areas is partially the result of human maintenance of the landscape through traditional agricultural use; therefore also the largest protected area in the region Goričko Landscape Park (covering 34.5% of the region) protects its unique cultural landscape as well as numerous localities of cultural heritage reflecting the natural conditions of the area to which the local population adapted throughout the centuries. Due to various threats to the area - such as intensive overgrowth of some parts in the park due to the abandonment of cultivation, the establishment of the park was necessary in order to preserve the area, but on the other hand the richness of the biodiversity can only be maintained through continuing human presence and activities - especially agriculture. The entire Pomurje region is recognized as the main agricultural region in Slovenia. The percentage of agricultural land (61% in the region; 28% in Slovenia) and arable land (42% in the region; 10% in Slovenia; MESP, 2011) in Pomurje is also an important component of environmental capital, positioning the region in the first place in Slovenia in terms of opportunities for food self-sufficiency. With the remediation of environmental problems related to agriculture (water and soil pollution), the region has the potential to become not only self-sufficient but also a region with safe food production.

Tourism is another source of sustainable development potential in Pomurje. This economic activity is based primarily on the use of the region’s most abundant natural resource - thermal waters. The most important tourism entity in the region is the spa Terme 3000 in Moravske Toplice. It has developed intensively in recent decades and is gradually linking its offer with the overall tourism attractions of the region, which are increasingly more sustainably oriented. The latest development of tourism (such as biking trails and other projects based on the area’s tradition) was assisted strongly by various EU funds, and some segments of this offer can be recognized as a good practice of sustainable tourism. The main development generators in terms of new ideas and networking of tourism entities are the three regional development agencies (the Mura Regional Development Agency, Sinergija, Prleška Development Agency); significant also is the role of the Goričko Landscape Park management institution. Their responsibility is to achieve an equilibrium between the preservation of natural and cultural heritage on the one hand and development on the other, with the latest being oriented towards agriculture (focused on food production and associated maintenance of the cultural landscape) and tourism based on the environmental capital of the park, as well as on the rich regional cultural heritage, tradition and strong social capital of the local population.

Figure 3: The web of institutions and their role in sustainable tourism development in the Pomurje region.





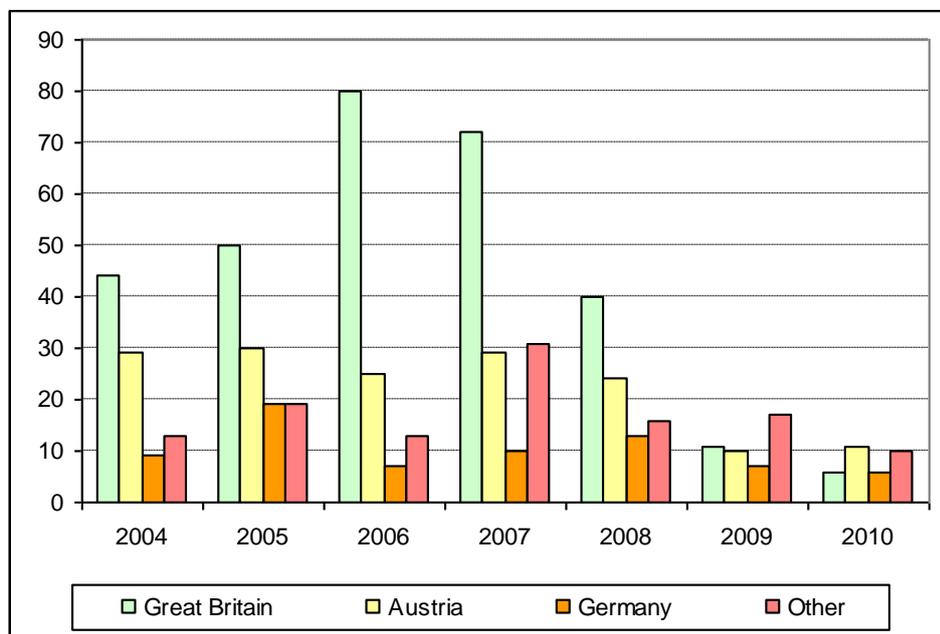
Peripheral **rural localities are becoming increasingly attractive also to transnational in-migrants**, not only because of improved transport connections but also due to lower property prices, the recognized high natural amenity of rural areas, nostalgia, and similar (Woods, 2007b). These factors are very significant in the growing market for foreign property investment in rural regions of Central and Eastern Europe.

Foreign home ownership (second home owners and permanent residents) can be considered a positive development. It can have a stimulating effect on the development of the local economy, increase of services, and renewal of abandoned villages and the cultural landscape.

This process can be seen on a smaller scale in Slovenia as well. Over the period from May 2004 to the end of 2010, there were 3576 foreign purchases of real estate in Slovenia (MF, 2010). The majority of new real estate owners are second home owners but in some regions they have also settled down permanently as part of the resident population.

The overall number of foreigners in Pomurje is relatively small (1099 in 2011), but the share of foreigners from EU countries is the highest (28%) of all Slovenian regions (SORS, 2011). The purchase of a second home or permanent residence by predominantly British migrants (mostly to the hilly area of Goričko) has been attributed to their nostalgic desire for a certain lifestyle. An essential motive in the purchase of property in remoter parts of rural Europe is the quality of the environment (landscape) and a simpler way of life. But two other factors played a crucial role: the very low cost of housing and the existence of low cost airline connections (London – Graz). Also worth mentioning is the part played by an individual from the UK who started to advertise the idyllic countryside in Slovenia, Goričko (via the internet) in 2004 and 2005 and managed to sell several run-down houses in the region.

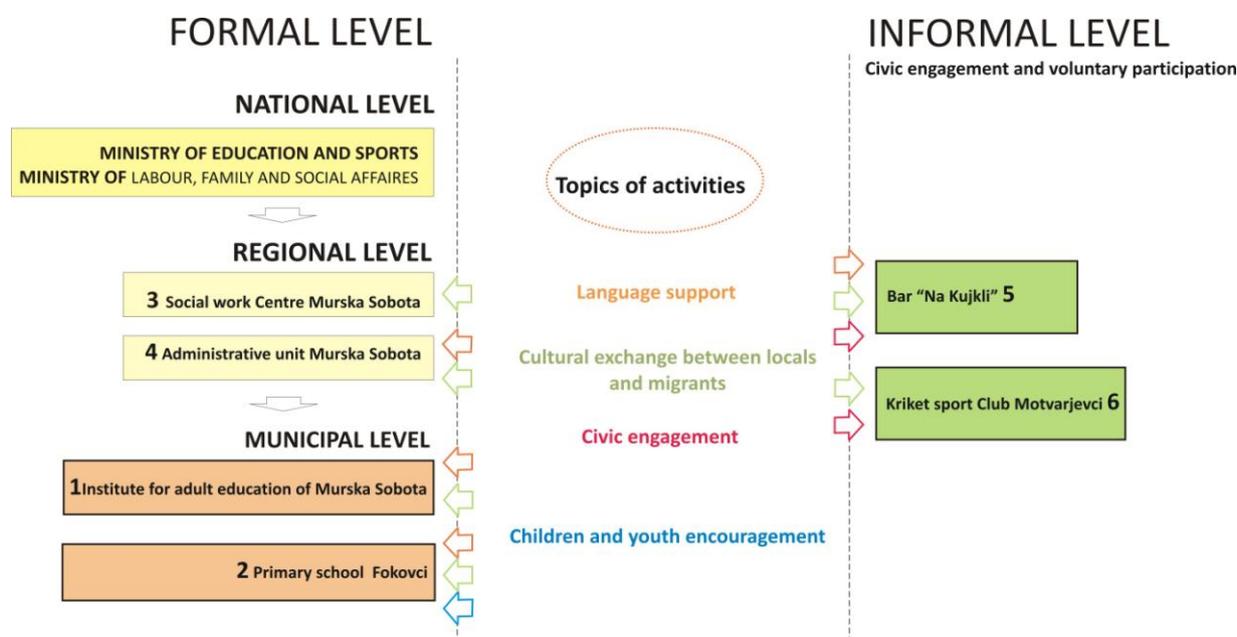
Figure 4: The structure of citizenship of foreign purchases of real estate in the Pomurje region.



Source: MF, 2010

The research focused on **amenity migrants**: their reasons for coming to the region, obstacles they encountered in purchasing real estate, settling down in the new country and finally their integration into rural society. The results of our interviews show an overall satisfaction of foreigners with the beautiful and pleasant landscape, new culture and people, but disappointment in the formal part of inclusion in the new society: bureaucratic obstacles and the very poor language (English) knowledge of officials are often exposed as negative experiences in Slovenia. On the other hand, their integration in the local environment (i.e. at the level of villages) was mostly a very positive experience. In the case of our research region the “best practice” is the local population and their acceptance of foreign home owners into their social activities and everyday life. The highest share of in-migrants from EU countries, the poor economic situation, the border and peripheral position of the region are all factors which influence the different attitude of local people towards the new settlers. In the case of the Pomurje region the increasing trend of international residential property purchase as a result of globalization is recognized as positive experience mostly in terms of integration with local communities.

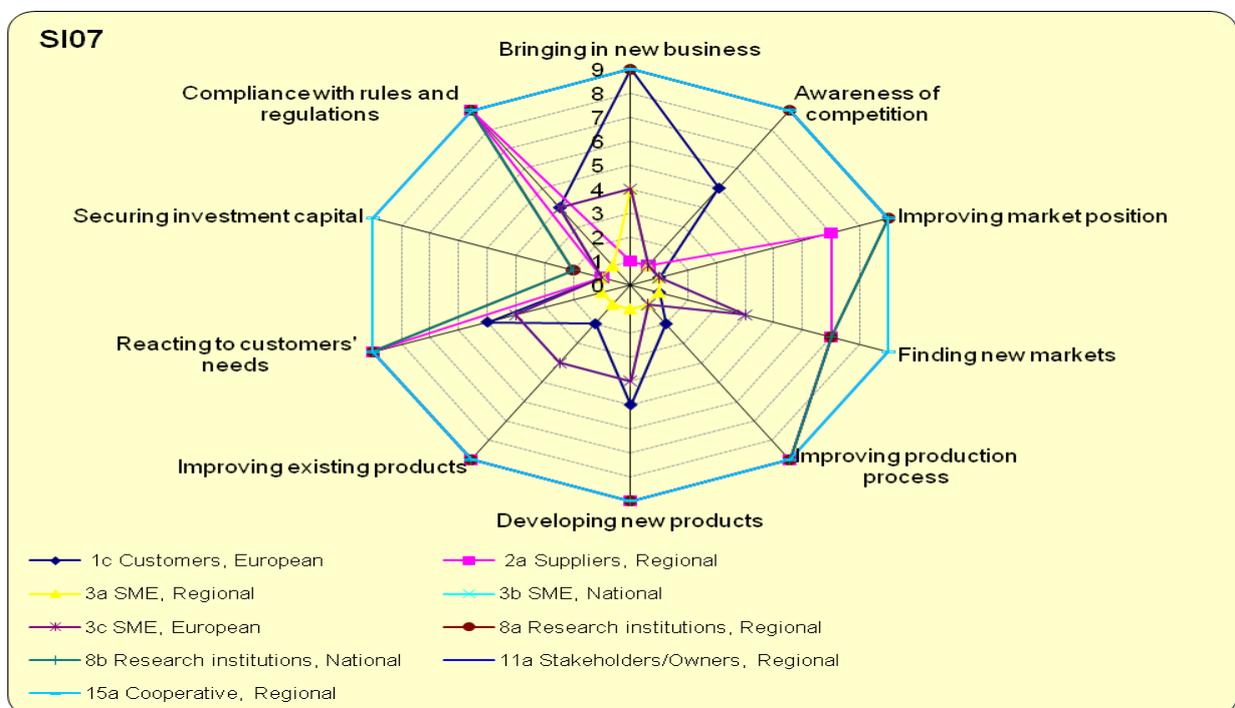
Figure 5: The role of institutions and civil society related to amenity migrants in the Pomurje region.



Slovenian rural areas are characterized by continuous **long-term underdeveloped entrepreneurship**. After the collapse of the communist system and the former Yugoslavia, vast changes have occurred as a result of EU integration and acceptance of the common Agricultural Policy and Rural Development Program; consequently entrepreneurship has been (at least formally) indicated as an important development factor of rural areas. The reality, however, lags behind the proposed guidelines. The decline of larger systems and their subsidiaries was not replaced by private entrepreneurship at the same pace, while in the former system private entrepreneurship had a limited and quite minor role as well as a negative image. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), on the other hand, do not develop overnight: a successful combination of ideas, interest, capital, markets, contacts, social network etc. must first be in place. The data confirm that most of the firm's activities take place outside the regional framework (see Figures 6 and 7). Even those surveyed firms that have a strong international profile perform only a modest share of total transactions outside the European continent. The results obtained indicate that the SMEs surveyed have established stronger ties with SMEs (most evident at the national level) than with large firms or multinational companies (at the European level). The majority of surveyed firms in the

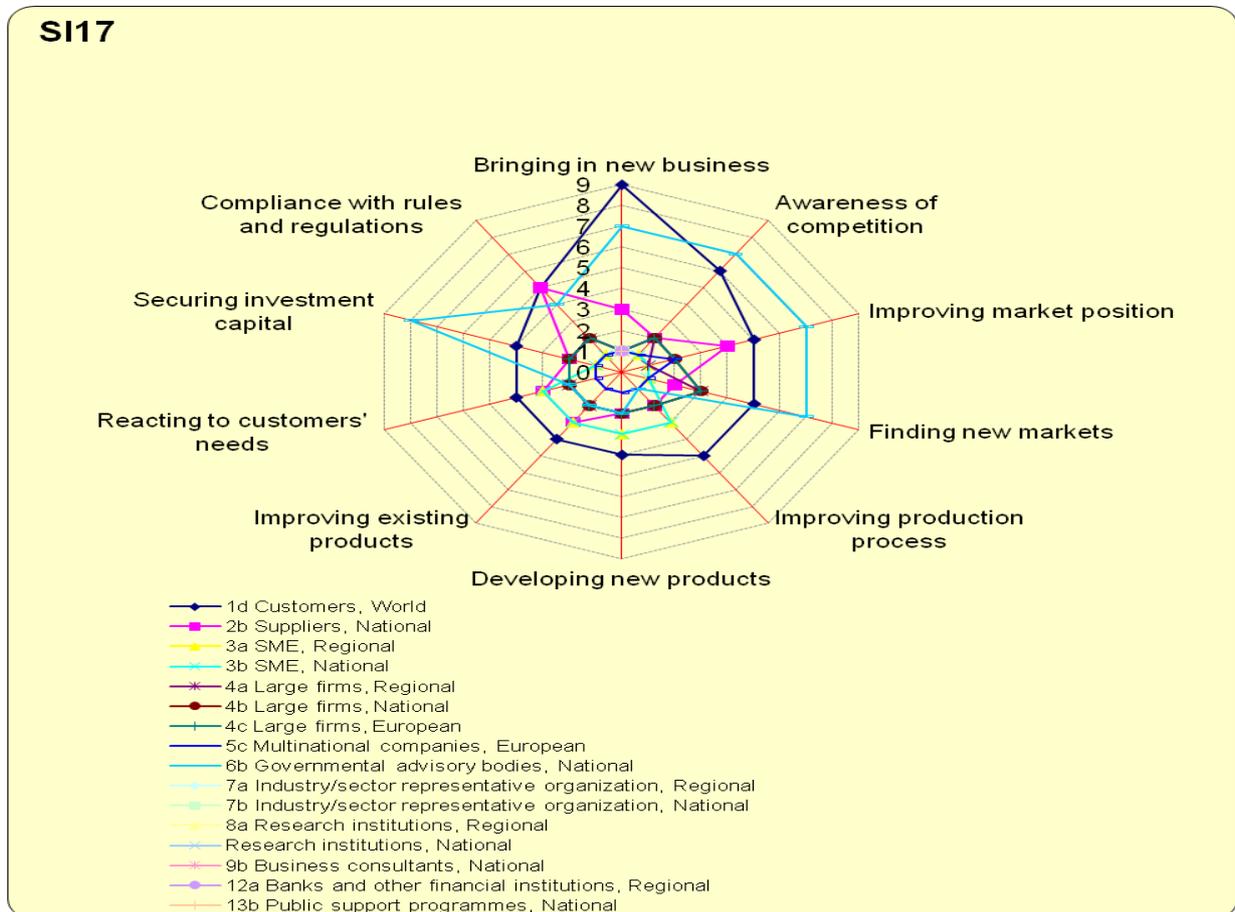
Goriška region are highly integrated into the international and globalized market as a consequence of a relatively small domestic market and long-lasting cross-border relations. The bulk of firms in this border zone with Italy already adopted resilience strategies 20-30 years ago – they are mostly export-oriented (European networks prevail). Yet some firms are evidently embedded in the local and regional environment. Some traditional firms (dairy, viticulture) are locally embedded in the field of supply (fresh high quality milk, reeds etc.), but they have evolved different resilience strategies.

Figure 6: Locally embedded firm in the field of supply, highly specialized, owned by a traditional cooperative, otherwise strongly internationalized firm.



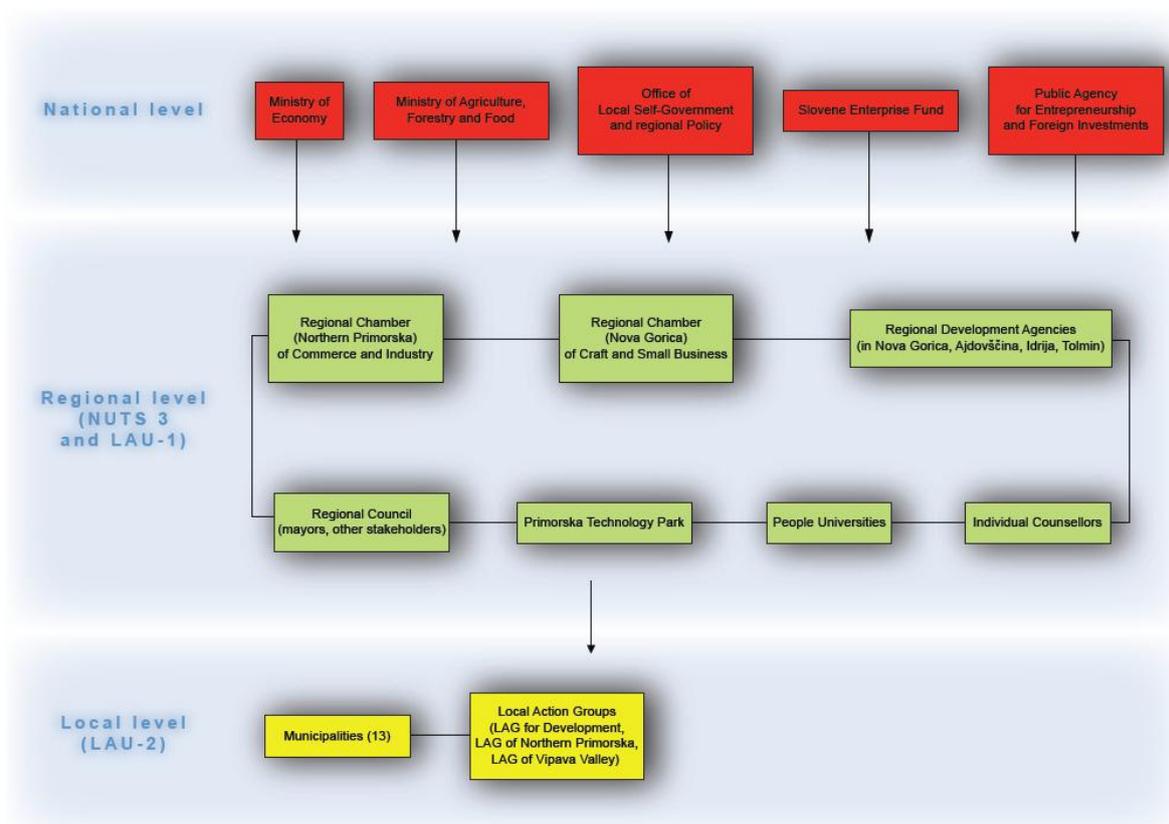
Note: 1c, 2a, 3a, 3c etc. are codes indicating the variety of partners on different levels (local and regional, national, European, World).

Figure 7: Firm with strong international relationships, which is also an example of a globalized firm, but also having a strong attachment and responsibility to the local environment.



It becomes obvious that the mapping of the firms' business network cannot be performed by using solely quantitative methods. The importance of personal contacts, the role of third party organizations (universities, professional associations etc.; Figure 8) as connecting points for SMEs "going global" and the strategic choices of establishing extra-regional collaboration cannot be measured using purely economic or trade indicators.

Figure 8: Scheme of business-support institutions in Goriška region.



Above mentioned geostrategic and economic perspective together with globalisation processes have transformed business development in Goriška region essentially after the decay of socialism and disintegration of Yugoslavia. There have been several key factors that have contributed to network development:

- (1) rich history of cross-border co-operation with first experiences of networking,
- (2) dynamic and closely related (interwoven) cross-border region with huge development potentials and intra-regional development ambitions,
- (3) very strong regional identity (*"The inhabitants of Goriška statistical region will promote innovation, develop our competence and co-operation with all fields of life and work. We will make our economy even more competitive, we will ensure a permanent development and the protection and use of natural resources. We will*



maintain the population density in the countryside and strive for a high quality of life, typical of developed European regions.” (RDP, 2007, 34) ,

- (4) expressed entrepreneurial spirit in the region with interesting examples on the Italian side of the border (functioning as a model),
- (5) accessibility of public (mostly national, also international) co-financing and ability to absorb various funds,
- (6) preparedness of Slovenian and Italian partners to participate in networking, including also both ethnic minorities, is profiting also from bilingualism,
- (7) sustainability of networks is an important issue since the conclusion of project usually ends the active stage of network activities; but some cases indicate that good network past experiences could pave new initiatives and future networks,
- (8) initial interest from different partners in networks (private and public) is usually quite soon faced with reality, i. e. huge administrative work, financial problems, inadequate planning, personnel shortage, unreal expectations, modest financial means; therefore few partners withdraw their partnership,
- (9) successful are initiatives that rely on capable actors, real regional needs and potentials, and with innovative ideas.

4. Conclusions

In Slovenia two border rural regions were studied within DERREG project: the Pomurje region and the Goriška region, in which different parts of the study were conducted. In the Pomurje region the main focus was: (1) environmental capital and sustainable development of economic activities based on the region's preserved environment (i.e. tourism); (2) migration flows in rural areas, in particular amenity migrations.

In the Goriška region the project objectives were implemented through a study of rural business. In both selected regions, the main goal was to identify the balance in opportunities and reality as well as threats caused by various globalization processes.

Environmental capital represents a major development potential of Slovenian rural areas, and as such is recognized also through various forms of protected areas and areas of Natura 2000. A well-preserved environment along with a rich cultural heritage and strong social capital represent the main pull factors for the development of tourism. **Sustainable tourism**



development has been coming increasingly to the fore in recent times, and as such is also widely supported through different EU projects. One of the constraints on the success of these projects is too strong dependency on EU funding, and at present the sustainability of tourism project results is to some extent questionable. Unfortunately, this segment is still difficult to assess objectively, since insufficient time has passed since the completion of most of the projects.

A **well-preserved natural environment in combination with a few other motives (low cost of living and relatively cheap and available real estate, improved transport connection)** triggered another process caused by globalization – international migration flows, in particular **amenity migration**. The Pomurje region is one of the best examples in Slovenia where foreign home owners appeared in a traditional rural environment. The migrants decided to either settle down in the region or to use their property as second homes. They greatly appreciate the preserved rural environment and the openness of the local population on the one hand, but they have had to deal with ignorance and unfriendly experiences in dealing with public authorities and institutions in the formal part of their integration on the other. This points out that rural areas are formally not ready to respond rapidly to the new social and spatial phenomena.

Amenity migrants in the Pomurje region have positively contributed to the preservation of cultural heritage preservation since they bought run-down houses which they have renovated in the traditional style and in keeping with the region's environment. With their sympathies and positive attitude to the rural milieu and local tradition, they have also made a positive impact by strengthening the values of the local population, which prior to this had been eroding. This is one of the good examples of positive globalization impacts on peripheral rural areas.

In connection with globalization processes, **rural business** is very specific and does not depend on the same spatial and socio-economic structures of every rural region. In the Goriška region, for example, there has been dual-track economic development over the past twenty years: (1) large enterprises and SMEs, some of them originating from the socialist period, the others established more recently; both have undergone rapid and comprehensive transformation as they had to adapt to a new business environment; (2) sole proprietor and micro firms that played an important pioneer role in the former system as they introduced the entrepreneurship mentality based on Italian experiences; nowadays they also need to adapt to very severe competition on domestic and foreign markets.



The Goriška region is strongly and widely exposed to external environments and is therefore very sensitive and fragile to market disturbances during periods of economic crisis: at present the gradual examples of the chain reaction effect can be witnessed, and numerous firms are being closed for various reasons. Globalization and embeddedness are parallel processes: they represent two different ways of 'sensing' the dynamics of a firm's business network. The 'globalizedness', i.e. the degree of globalization of a firm, and embeddedness fuel one another. An SME that is highly globalized is, to some extent, well embedded in its local setting. Local embeddedness increases resilience and the return of benefits to the region from global engagement. Firms trading internationally should be encouraged to source materials locally, and to participate in regional support networks (DERREG, European Policy Briefing 2011). Networking inside rural areas (a rural web connecting tangible and intangible capital) combined with purposeful and long-term international networking is nowadays necessary for the success of local/rural economies and sustainable rural development.



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