

**Special Issue Roots Tourism**

# FUORI LUOGO

Rivista di Sociologia  
del Territorio, Turismo, Tecnologia

*Guest Editors*

**Tullio Romita**

**Antonella Perri**

**Philippe Clairay**



Direttore Fabio Corbisiero  
Caporedattore Carmine Urciuoli

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# Ethnic Tourism: Preservation and Valorisation of Identity and Opportunity for the Development of Roots Tourism<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

A political border carries out several functions: it defines the boundaries within which an authority exercises its power and establishes the rules of identity belonging, it regulates the inbound and outbound transits of goods and people, and it defines the ways in which border realities are to be interacted with. The latter can be of maximum closure or maximum openness. That is, they can lead to policies of separation, exclusion, and protection (differentiation from the surrounding environment) or policies of articulation, inclusion, and collaboration (relationship with the surrounding environment). Thus, it is possible to move from a situation of alienation or coexistence (maximum closure) to a situation of interdependence or integration (maximum openness). The first situation corresponds to a reality where the militarization and bureaucratization of the border, strict control practices of cross-border traffic, mutual distrust and continuous hostilities prevent local populations from leading a normal life; as a result, it requires time to forget the acrimonies produced over time and significant cross-border interactions may be delayed. The second corresponds to a situation where the nationalisms of the border realities give way to a new internationalist ideology that emphasizes peaceful relations and the growth of the quality of life of their inhabitants. Consequently, consolidated collaborations at institutional and civil society level are created, leading to the creation of new processes between organizations and citizens (Gasparini, 2016; Zago, 2000). In this situation, border realities develop relationships which, starting from a deepening of mutual knowledge (through an exchange of information) are consolidated in the consultation of the counterpart on important decisions, in the alignment of the areas to make them homogeneous, in the creation of a sense of belonging to a cross-border territory. Thus, border areas develop what Gasparini (1994) defines as "differentiated forms of integration". When a state or a border region does not practice a defensive economic or identity policy, collaboration becomes intense, involving friendships, cross-border work, participation in cultural and recreational events, management of common services (e.g., in health or transport) or environmental emergencies, etc. at different degrees of intensity.

This premise on the role of the border is necessary to contextualise the territory debated in the article and the main context variables, thus leading to analyse the basic conditions for the development of a roots tourism that characterizes the cross-border area also with ethnic connotations. In fact, as is often the case in border areas, even those of the North-East have undergone continuous and significant identity transformations. The presence of different cultures (Italian, Friulian, Slovene, German, etc.) has enriched the identity of the places but their abandonment, in the last century, by choice, for work needs, by constraint (e.g., Julian-Dalmatian exodus) or, simply, due to natural demographic decline, have risked dispersing a significant cultural heritage. In recent years, thanks to the role of ethnic-linguistic communities and cross-border cooperation programmes, projects have been launched to exploit the linguistic and cultural heritage, by creating thematic historical-naturalistic itineraries, promoting opportunities for food and wine collaboration, fostering cross-border mobility, etc. The European funding

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in the World, etc.), a tourism addressed to those who have abandoned these lands and to their descendants, in order to re-discover the places so regenerated, the traditions recovered, and flavours preserved, in view of a sense of belonging to family memories and narratives. The article focuses on what the Italian national communities of Slovenia and the Slovenian of Italy, through the various cross-border programmes, have achieved to promote a roots tourism in terms of sustainability, recovery of traditions, renovation of the architectural heritage, involvement of ethnic-linguistic communities and the creation of multi-sensorial itineraries.<sup>3</sup> The keywords of roots tourism addressed here are those linked to personal and collective memories, to village festivals and religious rituals, to friendships, to the familiarity of the places, to the pride of territorial and community belonging, to cultural identity, to local knowledge and flavours, to relevant architectural and landscape heritage, etc. The planning has thus increased the tourist attractiveness and visibility of cross-border areas through sustainable models, innovative products and a marketing of cultural heritage and ecotypes of landscapes planned through green technologies.

## 1. Theme and Literature

The territory under consideration straddles the border between the Friuli Venezia Giulia region and Slovenia. It is an area that, throughout history, has experienced many border changes, becoming a place of encounters and clashes, declining its essence as a crossroads, border between Central and Southern Europe and where, by contaminating each other, the three main European families coexisted: Germanic, Slavic, and Latin. Over the past few centuries, the border has not been equally stable (or shifting) (Bufon, 2002). The Northern area has been more stable; it is the border between the localities of Chiusaforte/Kluže and Cormòns/Krmin which had divided the Venetian Republic from Austria, since the Diet of Worms in 1521 (Valussi, 1972: 73ss.). This border still exists, except for the division of the Italian and Slovenian Collio/Brda which was in Austrian territory. The remaining part of the border is more recent and was affected by the great conflicts of the last century and by the political decisions taken at the end of the Second World War which significantly involved the Gorizia and the Trieste area with Istria. The Treaty of Paris (1947) and the inclusion of Istria and Dalmatia (regions of Slovenia and Croatia) in the Yugoslavia Federal People's Republic, formerly part of the Italian Kingdom, have actually set back the border and the regime established triggered the exodus of almost the entire Italian population (about 250,000 people from the cities of Koper/Capodistria, Pula/Pola, Rijeka/Fiume, Zadar/Zara, etc.) who abandoned their jobs, home, affections and possessions in order to seek refuge in Italy or emigrated overseas (mainly to the United States and Canada, Argentina, Venezuela, Brazil and Australia) (Pupo, 2005). Another important event should also be remembered: the exodus of Slovenes and Croats who, during the two wars and under the fascist oppression, preferred to abandon their lands or were forced to do so under the impulse of the policy of denationalization of the Slavic communities. The quantification of these flows is difficult but, according to the literature, the number of emigrants from Venezia Giulia is around 100,000 units bound to Yugoslavia or South America, in particular Argentina (Kalc, 1996; Klemenčič, 2005; Purini, 2000). Nowadays, the various associations of the exiles (Venezia Giulia and Dalmatia, Julian in the World, of the Istrian Communities, Italians of Pola, and Istria, etc.) have the task of representing and connecting these emigrants, keeping alive the memories, the contacts with the territory and protecting their traditions. A study on the identity of Istrian, Fiuman and Dalmatian exiles in Italy

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3 In addition to the Slovenian one, the Germanic and Friulian linguistic communities are present in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region; the latter was the protagonist, during the last century, of a consistent migratory flow whose links with the mother land are kept alive by the *Fogolârs furlans*, associations spread all over the world and made up of emigrants originating from historic Friuli. Despite this, the article focuses on the two Italian and Slovenian national communities, present on both sides of the border.

and around the world highlights some interesting aspects (Gasparini, 2008). For all of them, the belonging to the Italian culture is very strong but if for the overseas exiles the feeling of being Istrian (and less Fiuman or Dalmatian) follows, for the Italian ones the feeling of being European is more important. The memory of the exodus is still well imprinted but one of the risks is its dispersion, the lack of transmission to the new generations, both for the silence of the elders (partly due to the removal of painful memories) and for the lack of interest of the children in learning about the past. This danger is less present in the third generations who rediscover their roots, considering the cultural heritage transmitted to them as a source of wealth. Thus, the problem arises of how to keep alive the sense of belonging in the new generations: through family dialogue, with the remaining natives or, simply, with the legacies of the territories still present or rediscovered and valorised, so that the search for roots becomes a source of richness of cultural belonging. The Julians in the World Association organizes the training and cultural internship called "Discovering one's roots", with the aim of introducing the young generations descendants of Trieste, Gorizia, and Istria emigrants to the territory where their parents, grandparents and/or great-grandparents were born and the "Elderly Stay" aimed at those over 65 who have always lived far away, despite being of Julian or Istrian origin.

Koderman's study (2012) on Slovenian communities in the United States and Australia shows that, for one in four people, the reason for visiting Slovenia is the discovery of the ethnic/ancestral heritage. Interest in family history must be interpreted as a response to multicultural societies that gradually absorb ethnic identities (Basu, 2005). This experience also changes the perception of one's identity: visitors begin to feel a closer connection with their Slovenian ancestors or want to know more about their family history in Slovenia. In fact, as King & Christou (2009) argue, this type of travel is made to articulate the sense of belonging to a historical community and to (re-)affirm one's origins. The study by Ferrari & Nicotera (2021: 80) on Italians in Argentina also shows that the most important reasons for travelling were to visit the places linked to one's family history, to strengthen one's identity heritage and to reduce the sense of loss of roots.

Cross-border collaboration activities are now possible thanks to the changed international geo-political climate, the better living conditions of the populations, the greater weight attributed to regions and border regions in particular, etc. which have overcome the acrimony linked to the Second World War and its consequences on the partition of the border territories between Italy and Yugoslavia. Above all, they are caused by some events that have profoundly affected the relations between the two countries: the Treaty of Osimo (1975), the Alpe-Adria experience, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989), the independence of Slovenia (1991), its entry into the European Union (2004) and the Schengen area (2007) and, importantly, the European Union's attention to border areas. In fact, since the end of the 1980s, within the economic and social cohesion policy aimed at reducing disparities and increasing regional development potential (Wassenberg & Reitel, 2015), the European Union has begun to pay attention to the peripheral areas of its member states, areas in which almost 40% of European citizens are concentrated and which have suffered from their position of marginalization and structural poverty. The European Commission, with the first INTERREG programme (1991-1993), promoted interventions aimed at solving the main criticalities of the border areas, such as language barriers and historical-cultural reluctance to cooperate with neighbours, differing levels and rhythms of economic development, the weakness of cross-border relations and joint territorial planning. The success of the initiative has led, over time, to transform the programme into one of the objectives of the cohesion policy. Today, the programme has reached its sixth edition (2021-2027), involving a total of 73 border areas, 49 of which within the Union. Specifically in the Italian-Slovenian area, the cross-border INTERREG has brought, during the last two programmes (2007-2013, 2014-2020), funding for over 200 million euros allocated to 145 projects. Projects focused on the consolidation of cross-border *governance*, the innovation capacities of companies and the strengthening of research, the transition towards a low-carbon economy, the protection of cultural and natural heritage, the digitalisation of public administration and on social rights (ed-

ucation, employment, social inclusion, etc.). Because its ability to connect all these aspects, the tourism sector has drawn great attention (Zago, 2015). The border area affected by the presence of the two communities counts 531,000 arrivals and 1,757,000 overnight stays in Italy (tourist areas of Tarvisio and Sella Nevea, Gorizia and Grado-Aquileia and Trieste) (Fvg Region, 2021: 174) and 789,000 arrivals and 2,575,000 overnight stays in Slovenia (Karst and Mediterranean macro-area) (Slovenian Tourist Board, 2021: 13). Foreigners account for about 40% in the Italian areas and 35% in the Slovenian ones. The area can count on significant naturalistic, landscape and historical-cultural attractions (archaeological, religious, etc.), sites recognized by UNESCO, relevant seaside and ski resorts, expressions of local craftsmanship, seafaring, food and wine culture (Gasparini & Zago, 2011). It is an offer that meets the tastes of the modern tourist, cultured, independent and attentive to the themes of sustainability, authenticity, and specificity of places (Clancy, 2017). The good results obtained with cross-border cooperation have been made possible not only thanks to the local economic and cultural institutions and operators but also to the will of the regional and national actors who, over the years, have given life to advanced cross-border cooperation structures, such as European Group of Territorial Cooperation "Euregio Without Borders" between the Regions of Friuli Venezia Giulia and Veneto and the Land of Carinthia and, at a local level, the "GO" EGTC between the municipalities of Gorizia, Nova Gorica and Šempeter-Vrtojba which have launched important projects for the mobility and tourist enhancement of cross-border heritage.

As anticipated, the roots tourism, declinable with multiple meanings (Tomczewska-Popowycza & Tarasb, 2022), is addressed here from the point of view of ethnic-linguistic minorities. In fact, a strong element of authenticity also from the tourist point of view of this cross-border territory is given by the presence of the two national communities living on the distinct sides of the border: the Italian national community residing in Slovenia and the Slovenian national community residing in Italy, more specifically in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region. This specification means that the theme of roots tourism intersects with the ethnic one even if, obviously, there are differences in the type of tourist and in the way of fruition. In fact, on the one hand, there are emigrants – who have lived part of their lives in the place of origin where they are on holiday – and their descendants, born and raised elsewhere but who feel connected to the places of their family origins (Ferrari & Nicotera, 2021; Perri, 2020; Romita & Perri, 2009); on the other hand, there are occasional tourists curious to learn about the history and traditions of an ethnic group and to interact with it (Diekmann & Smith, 2015; Hitchcock, 1999; Neilson, 2016; Rath, 2007).

With reference to the fruition, in the first case, we are dealing with an "existential" tourism where the visitor is totally identified with the centre of value of the host community; in the second case, we are faced with an "experiential" tourism where the visitor gives meaning to the tourist experience while remaining aware of his own extraneousness to the cultural environment (Cohen, 1979). At the basis, there is not only the presence or absence of a "family interest" in visiting a destination; there is a different way of connecting with the destination, linked to distinct modes of attachment: "emotional-familiar" that activates memories of stories and family traditions or of an "aesthetic" and "cognitive-cultural" order where peculiar aspects, mental representations and cultural diversities prevail (Giani Gallino, 2007).

There are, however, two other aspects that do not necessarily distinguish the two types of tourism mentioned: the methods of organizing the tourist offer and the self-representation of the destination community, particularly where this is characterised by ethnic-linguistic specificities as a minority. Attention to tourism as an opportunity for development can push a minority to confront itself with its own identity and what it wants to communicate externally. Indeed, root journeys can be used by ethnic groups to reaffirm and present their naturalistic and cultural heritage (Esman, 1984). The construction of a "themed-based image" in an ethnic-linguistic key, on the one hand, can be an opportunity to rediscover, exploit and strengthen the memory and the sense of belonging to a common history but, on the other hand, it can lead to the "commodification" of ethnic diversity to develop "place branding" mechanisms. The realization of events or

the visualization of one's history and identity through panels, QR codes, etc. which refer to texts, audio, and video, can keep the memory of the community alive and strengthen the feeling of belonging but it should be remembered that the narration implies an interpretation that must be shared with the other communities present in the area. In 2011 (Bezin & Dolhar), the first tourist guide on the city of Trieste/Trst was not limited anymore on Svevo or its Viennese cafes but was aimed at narrating its different souls, from its Slovenian to Jewish heritage, as much as its Serbian and Greek traces. The risks concern the stereotyping of the elements of authenticity which clashes with a definition of dynamic and constantly evolving culture and the possible manifestations of resistance on the part of the population that considers events and tourists as interference in their everyday life and in the use of public spaces (Marzorati & Nuvolati, 2007; Rath, 2007). This point recalls another important aspect: the existence of a willingness on the part of the residents to make their spaces available with a view to promoting tourism. This means preparing and making the *back region* accessible to non-residents as well.

## 2. Methodology

The offer of roots tourism on the Eastern Italian and Western Slovenian borders is strongly linked to the presence of minorities living in the area whose collaborations have created the conditions for the development of ethnic and return tourism. Therefore, before describing the methodology, it is useful to describe the actors and the main projects carried out within the INTERREG Italy-Slovenia cross-border cooperation program.

The Italian community is present in the four bilingual coastal municipalities of Ankaran/Ankarano, Koper/Capodistria, Izola/Isola and Piran/Pirano and there are numerous organizations involved in keeping the Italian culture and language alive in the area, with the purpose of defending its identity. At political level, maximum political representation is guaranteed with the so-called specific seat of the Italian representative in the State Chamber of the Slovenian Parliament. At the municipal level, political representation in the four bilingual municipalities is ensured by the Self-governing Communities of the National Community. These Communities are gathered at the coastal level in the Coastal Self-governing Community of the Italian Nationality (*Obalna Samoupravna Skupnost Italijanske Narodnosti*), a public body which, according to its Statute, "operates for the protection of the particular rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia and the realization of the interests and needs of the Italian national community in the Republic of Slovenia". The Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, in Articles 5, 11, 64, 80, establishes the rights guaranteed to the community: the use of its own language and national symbols, the establishment of organizations, the development of economic and cultural activities as well as scientific research and activities in the field of public information sector and publishing, etc. "regardless of the number of community members". Based on the 2002 census, the members by declaration of Italian nationality are 2,258, while the members by declaration of Italian mother tongue are 3,762, essentially concentrated in the three coastal municipalities of the Karst-Littoral region (Primorska) of Koper/Capodistria, Piran/Pirano and Izola/Isola.

Cultural expression and the preservation of community traditions are ensured through the invaluable activity of civil society. This is organized in the Communities of Italians, cultural associations which, thanks to Italian and Slovenian public funding, organize concerts, literary evenings, playful-artistic activities for children and sports to create places and moments of aggregation in Italian language. They are the beating heart of the community which, since the Second World War, enliven the territory to keep the Italian identity of the cities alive. The unitary organization of the Italians of Slovenia and Croatia is the Italian Union (*Unione Italiana* in italiano, *Italijanska Unija* in Slovenian and *Talijanska Unija* in Croatian) which brings together under its aegis a total of 51 communities of Italians, of which 7 in Slovenia and 46 in Croatia. Its headquarters are in

Rijeka/Fiume and in Koper/Capodistria. The effective members over 18 registered in the Italian Communities, belonging to the Italian Union, are 31,922, of which 3,254 in Slovenia and 28,668 in Croatia. The Italian Union, through the "Europe" Office located in Koper/Capodistria, inaugurated the participation of the community in European projects whose realization was possible thanks to the collaboration established with the Slovenian community in Italy, first in the context of Slovenian Regional Economic Union (*Slovensko Deželno Gospodarsko Združenje*) – an association of entrepreneurs in Italy – and, subsequently, with the foundation in 2004, of the Euroservis company Srl of Trieste. The projects have a common denominator, namely the protection of their own identity and the development of initiatives aimed at promoting new projects in the area that see national communities as protagonists, based on their culture, identity, and language.

The Slovenian national community is historically present in the Friuli Venezia Giulia region within the three provinces located close to the border with Slovenia: Udine/Videm, Gorizia/Gorica and Trieste/Trst. The Slovenian settlement belt extends from Tarvisio/Trbiž (in the province of Udine) to Muggia/Milije (in the province of Trieste) and is divided into about six *enclaves*, created because of historical, socio-cultural, political, and economic circumstances: Val Canale (Kanalska Dolina), Val Resia (Rosajanska Dolina), Valli del Torre (Terska Dolina), Valli del Natisone (Nediške Doline), Goriziano (Goriška) and Triestino (Tržaška). Law no. 38 of 2001 on "Regulations for the protection of the Slovenian linguistic minority of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region" includes 32 municipalities in the areas considered. These territories have been ethnically mixed for centuries. In fact, even towards the end of the 6th century AD, the Slavic ancestors settled there after having migrated from the Balkan-Danubian area. The territories of Benecia (Benečija) and Val Resia became part of the Kingdom of Italy after the Third War of Independence (1866) while Val Canale and the territories of Gorizia and Trieste were assigned to Italy after the First World War. The advent of fascism led to a policy of forced Italianization of the minority, banning the use of the Slovenian language in public places and abolishing most of the cultural institutions. The Slovenian-speaking population in Friuli Venezia Giulia is currently estimated at around 46,000 people (Jelen *et al.*, 2018).

The tensions exploded during the Second World War and continued also in the following years, facilitated by the presence of a closed border that accentuated the ethnic-linguistic differences (Marušič, 2007). Slovenia's independence and what followed facilitated relations with Italy and brought benefits to the Slovenian community which began to strongly assert its *status* and identity (Bufon, 2019). Younger generations belonging to both communities saw the border as an integral element of the Italian-Slovenian territory and not as a rigid instrument of identity demarcation, as it had happened with the previous generation where collective memories were built on accusations, resentments and claims towards those "on the other part of the border", held directly responsible for what happened (Cattunar, 2019). The minority is seen as a strong identity element of the territory that plays a mediating function in communication between Italians and Slovenes (Zago, 2019: 37). So, ethnic-linguistic diversity becomes an added value for border territories and cross-border cooperation because, as emerges from a study by the European Centre for Minority Issues in collaboration with the European Academy Bolzano-Bozen (2016), minorities are intended as promoters of economic and social development and the strengthening of transnational relations as well, as the activities are not self-referential but benefit the entire population.

The Slovenian community is represented by two organizations recognized by a regional law (No. 26/2007): the Slovenian Cultural and Economic Union (*Slovenska Kulturno-Gospodarska Zveza*) and the Confederation of Slovenian Organizations (*Svet Slovenskih Organizacij*) who act as interlocutors with local, national, and European institutions. Both organizations carry out community protection and development activities in all aspects of political, social, cultural, recreational life, etc. promoting the Slovenian language and fruitful cooperation between Slovenia and Italy.

Unlike the Italian community of Slovenia, the Slovenian community in Italy does not have guaranteed electoral seats and, therefore, despite the presence of the only Slovenian party (the Slo-

vene Union, *Unione Slovena/Slovenska Skupnost*), the electorate is distributed within various political orientations so as to guarantee participation in institutional decision-making processes. However, there are consultation bodies at national, regional, and local levels through which the community interacts with institutions at political level.

The activities carried out within the community are numerous and take place in all productive and cultural spheres both within institutions and professional bodies and in an amateur form, especially in cultural and voluntary associations: from theatre and media (newspapers and magazines in standard Slovenian and dialectal variants, radio and television broadcasts, etc.), to film productions and research, from choral singing to sports, from education to vocational training, from libraries to circles of former partisan fighters, from trade union activities to religious life (Bogatec & Vidau, 2016; Čavdek *et al.*, 2018).

Through the participation in INTERREG programmes and their representative organizations, the two Italian communities in Slovenia and Slovenian in Italy have carried out projects with the main objective of promoting and developing their presence in the cross-border cooperation processes between the two countries and foster contacts with other realities, so as to valorise their identity and roots. There are several projects in the tourism sector that have brought the Italian and Slovenian identity of the territory to the centre, from the point of view of their respective minorities. The visitor and return tourist are thus offered the opportunity to get to know the borderlands through the minority, rediscovering their roots, customs, and traditions as well as the food and wine offer strongly linked to identity and culture. The projects dating from the early 2000s up to now described below represent the most important tourist initiatives for the two communities. Tourism in these frontier lands has always based its offer on food and wine and on the natural and cultural heritage that has attracted tourists from Central Europe and from all over Italy since the times of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. However, rediscovering these lands through the Italian and Slovenian presence is something new, a new trend that these projects want to promote and exploit. Thanks to European funding, roots tourism linked to ethnic-linguistic communities has been able to develop, thus giving the opportunity to present places, people, and traditions also from a tourist point of view.

The MIN-TOUR project – *Minorities and tourism. Development of tourist attractions and joint promotion of the cross-border territory* (INTERREG III-A Italy-Slovenia 2000-2006) represents the turning point in the planning of minorities in the field of tourism, since until then there had been no joint activities for the valorisation of the resources of the area of historical settlement, common reflections, real collaborations with significant economic repercussions on the territories (Tremul, 2007: 8). With an overall budget of € 196,000, the partnership was made up of nineteen subjects, four of which from the Italian community and seven from the Slovenian community. The goal of the project was the enhancement of the tourist offer of the historical settlement area of the two communities, contributing to the promotion of their rich natural and cultural heritage, proposing a joint offer, designing innovative tourist services, and supporting the tourist offer of alternative routes and lesser-known destinations. The experience represented a new opportunity for the communities along the border, a new impetus of their minority role and, above all, the rediscovery of their own languages, experienced in the past as a negative element. Thanks to the attention paid by new tourists, the cross-border area became an important element to be preserved, valorised, and handed down (Negro, 2014). The project made up for a lack of tourist guides at the time: making the tourist who visited these lands aware of the historical presence of the two communities and the significant imprint of their cultures.

The AGROMIN project – *Minorities' agriculture. Detection and enhancement of the cross-border typical products* (INTERREG III-A Italy-Slovenia 2000-2006) focused on the exploitation of the primary resources of the two minorities, with a view to food and wine promotion included in tourist and cultural activities (Agromin, 2007). With an overall budget of € 250,000, the partnership was made up of seventeen subjects, four of which from the Italian community and five from the Slovenian community. As part of the project, fairs and publications were created to

present typical products, producers and traditional recipes, a bilingual Italian-Slovenian dictionary of technical terminology related to the agricultural sector and other promotional material disseminated throughout the reference area. In Italy, an information point has been set up close to the border to create a place where farmers can present their products and promote them for tourism purposes. Traditional productions and territorial specificities have found ample space in the tourist promotion of the roots also through taste and flavours, recognizing the uniqueness of some traditions, such as "Open Osmize" (the possibility, granted in 1784 by the Habsburg Empire, to sell for eight days at home the wine tax-free), "Flavours of Karst" which involves restaurateurs, producers, traders and artisans of the agri-food sector based in the Trieste and Gorizia Karst, the "Majenca" or the "Wedding karst", ancient rites of passage and ceremonies linked to the cycle of life.

In the following programming period (INTERREG IV-A Italy-Slovenia 2007-2013), the two national communities continued their collaboration with the JEZIK-LINGUA – *Multilingualism as a value and importance of the border between Italy and Slovenia*. The emphasis of this strategic project was placed on language and culture. With a budget of € 3 million, the project, through a partnership of twelve subjects, four of which from the Italian community and one from the Slovenian community, has developed a series of services aimed at strengthening the linguistic knowledge of both the majority population and the members toward minorities. The Slovenian community also included the construction in San Pietro al Natisone/Špiëtar of a museum dedicated to the cultural landscape that extends from the Julian Alps to the sea, which takes the name of SMO (*Slovensko Multimedia no Okno – Slovenian Multimedia Window*). It is one of the new forms that thematic and territorial museums are taking on: no longer collection museums but narrative museums. It is a multimedia centre which, through a series of installations, totems, and other digital media, presents the visitor with the culture and traditions of a community that, from a tourist point of view, often remains anonymous in the eyes of the visitor.

In the last programming period (INTERREG VA Italy-Slovenia 2014-2020), the organizations of the two national communities participated in the implementation of two projects in the tourism sector, thus underlining their role in this area. These are the tARTini projects – *Cultural tourism under the banner of Giuseppe Tartini* and PRIMIS – *Multicultural journey between Italy and Slovenia through the prism of minorities*. With a budget of € 1,286,926 and six partners, one of which belongs to the Italian community, the first project aimed at promoting the figure and cultural heritage of the famous Giuseppe Tartini, born in Pirano and who, in the age of the Enlightenment, was one of the most important composers and violinists in Europe, but also a scientist, intellectual and teacher of European fame and prominence. In addition to a multilingual site dedicated to the musician, the Tartini House was the subject of extensive restoration, and a new cross-border musical tourist route was created called "Tartini route" between Pirano, Padua, Trieste, and Ljubljana. With a budget of € 2,823,529 and ten partners, two of which from the Italian community and one from the Slovenian community, the objective of the PRIMIS project was to valorise the common linguistic and natural heritage of the minorities of the programme area to attract sustainable cultural tourism. This valorisation is done using innovative, interactive, and multimedia tools with immersive and virtual reality in the *ad hoc multimedia centres*. One of these multimedia centres was created in Koper/Capodistria in the historic Gravisi building, owned by the Italian Union, where a permanent exhibition on the Italian community is set up. Considering all this, we will now summarize the main answers provided on these experiences by a panel of experts, after fifteen years. Overall, 23 operators from the world of political institutions, economic organizations representing minorities, tourism promotion agencies and associations of both communities were interviewed.<sup>4</sup> All the interlocutors were able to evaluate

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4 The interviews were carried out in the framework of two research projects conducted by the authors for a PhD on Transborder Policies for Daily Life (IUIES): "The Italian-Slovenian cross-border cooperation: minorities and tourism. Analysis and possible future scenarios" (Bertok, 2007-08) and for a research grant: "Ethnotour: the valorisation of ethnic-linguistic identities for tourist consumption in the Italian-Slovenian border area" (scientific tutor: Zago, 2021-22).

the role that minorities play in cross-border integrative processes, with reference to the tourism sector and based on their experiences. In conducting the interviews, a positivist approach was adopted, according to which the interview is considered a source of information on facts and reasoning relating to the subject and his/her environment. Moreover, while following a set of questions, a more open approach was favoured, allowing for lengthy conversations and, above all, giving space for the expressiveness of the interviewees (Della Porta, 2010).

### 3. Results

The first aspect considered is the role of minorities as a tourist attraction factor. The general opinion is affirmative: minorities represent an added value for the territories. With their linguistic, cultural, and territorial heritage, they are very attractive, especially for a cultural and eco-sustainable tourism which constitutes a profitable market niche. A large part of these border territories would not stand up to mass tourism; therefore, they must turn to those who love nature and the uncontaminated environment, the pleasure of discovery, the direct contact with people and an authentic food and wine and cultural offer. There are also many school groups visiting Val Resia or Trieste from Italy or Slovenia encountering the multiculturalism of these places and not only with their Italian or cultural specificity.

A further aspect analysed is the difficulty of coordination between communities and the creation of networks between operators. There is a lack of collaboration at an entrepreneurial and institutional level. Often, the reasons are to be found in the lack of knowledge of languages or in mutual distrust or in the lack of economic aid. What needs to be improved are the continuity of partnerships, the promotion of specificities in the cross-border area and the economic awareness of identity and multiculturalism. There are events of anthropological interest such as the "Majenca" in San Dorligo della Valle/Dolina or the "Karst Wedding" in Monrupino/Repentabor or more traditional ones such as the "Invitation to lunch" in the Valli del Natisone which have significant development potential but are managed at amateur level or need to be extended to neighbouring municipalities. For example, in 2022 it was possible to organize the Karst wedding again after a long period of nine years when marriages could not take place.

It is therefore also a question of training. The tourist realities of the two communities are small, usually family-run realities that often do not survive the death of their owners: in the Valli del Natisone, many restaurant businesses are closing not for economic difficulties but for the lack of generational handover. These realities do not have the opportunity to be adequately trained. For example, on the Italian side, although tourists appreciate hearing the linguistic differences, operators often do not speak Slovenian or refuse to do so because they are used to speak Italian with Italians. For some time, one of the goals of Slovenian associations was that of creating a network of commercial establishments which make it clear that Slovenian is also spoken there. From another perspective, operators are afraid of "ghettoising" or recalling unpleasant memories, by proposing a product with Slovenian content. Training is therefore necessary so that the communities can become participants in the tourist offer of the place, highlighting its cultural specificities since the tourist who visits these territories is rarely aware of these diversities. The foreign tourist, even if descended from transplanted people abroad, often knows little or nothing about the events of these territories and no one tells them. The success of the MIN-TOUR project has been the creation of a tourist route that valorises the presence of a Slovenian community in Italy and an Italian community in Slovenia, where each one has its own troubled history in the last tragic short century, but ultimately moved past it with the process of European integration.

The other aspect that emerged from the interviews is related to the identity, belonging and self-representation of communities. It is a question of understanding how strong and alive the identity of a community is and how willing it is to open up and collaborate with other commu-

nities in the area. For example, the Trieste Karst/Kras is proposed for tourism as an integrated context and conceived as a homogeneous unit. Proposing ethnic tourism would mean splitting reality along an ethnic line. Thus, in order not to create conflict or fractures, it is preferred to continue to work as if it is the Karst community and not the Italian or Slovenian community. The national identity of many of these Karst communities is not well defined and proposing products with a strong Slovenian content would end up in alienating the Slovenian community. It is a problem of local identity. In Val Resia as in the Valli del Natisone, there is an organized presence of minorities against identification with Slovenia; the linguistic specificities, first of all, have formed communities that are proud of their belonging. More generally, however, the question must be posed in other terms: the ethnic content, beyond very particular contexts, such as the Val Resia or specific events such as the Majenca, is not an exotic product and, in comparison with other realities, the lifestyles are quite comparable. The question must be posed in terms of local speciality. The identity aspect is also linked to the way tour operators describe a territory. Trieste was also the cradle of Slovenian culture; in Trieste there is an organized Slovenian community; beyond the border there is a world that was Venetian, it breathes Venice, every stone of it is Venice. An Italian community has lived here for centuries, developing a culture, and giving a contribution to the Italian and European Enlightenment. Elements that are often not highlighted by the guidebooks and tourist guide.

The last aspect addressed is that of promotion. The general opinion is that there is a lack of adequate and above all joint promotion of the cross-border area. It must be said that minorities do not have adequate structures to deal with tourism promotion. However, they can act to coordinate Italian and Slovenian tour operators, offer them technical support and training opportunities, etc. Promoting a territory, with all it has to offer, presenting it with its authentic face which in border territories is plural from a linguistic and cultural point of view, is instead the task of bodies and institutions. The Friuli Venezia Giulia tourism promotion agency PromoTurismoFVG implements strategies focused on large urban centres and seaside or mountain tourism resorts. This does not mean, however, that through its communication channels it does not valorise or simply does not communicate the activities centred on the multiculturalism that characterises the region. Finally, tourist packages for visits to sites where minorities are present are not sufficiently thought out and promoted, presenting them with their folklore and cultural specificities.

#### **4. Final Discussion and Considerations**

Considering what has been written, it emerges that the roots tourism in these border lands can take on two connotations: for tourists the (re-)discovery of their origins and for the residents the confirmation of belonging to an active community proud of its history, culture, and territory. In both cases, it is an opportunity to (re-)affirm one's own identity, keep it alive and transmit it to future generations. The tourism product analysed for the two communities is not yet fully developed but the cross-border cooperation projects are building the conditions for it to be so. The analysis of the interviews has highlighted that the development of ethnic tourism in these border areas cannot ignore the territorial linguistic specificities (Val Resia, Valli del Natisone, Karst, Slovenian and Croatian Istria).

The ethnic-linguistic specificity of a territory enhances a tourist offer based on its heritage, but also strengthens a roots tourism based on the memory of places, sounds, ties that are experienced or told. The territory is at the same time a space, a set of resources and a product of relationships that define the identity of individuals and the community, but also an identifying element for those who visit it and recognise themselves in it. Thus, the territory becomes a product that makes itself known, appreciated, and bought better if it can be recognized and identified. Therefore, all the projects carried out by the ethnic-linguistic communities must be read with

this meaning, aimed at safeguarding the tangible and intangible heritage of their history and keeping the memory of the places alive by attracting occasional or return tourists. Not only to pursue an opportunity for tourism development but also to avoid dispersion and transmit their identity to the next generations. This is, for example, the case of the Italians who remained in the current territories of the Republics of Slovenia and Croatia who continued to cultivate – and still do today – their identity, language, and culture also thanks to European public interventions aimed at guaranteeing a generational *continuum* of the Italian presence in abandoned lands. A great achievement has been the inclusion, in 2021, of the Istrian-Venetian dialect in the Register of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of the Republic of Slovenia and Croatia.

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