

## **THE CHANGEABLE POLITICAL MAP OF THE UPPER ADRIATIC REGION: FROM CONFLICT TO HARMONY?**

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### ***Abstract***

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The paper will present a geopolitical and political geographical overview of the Upper Adriatic region as an area of contact between different cultural, social, economic and political entities, producing potential of conflicts, particularly in the period of growing nationalism and emerging nation-state formulation in this region.

### ***Key words***

Upper Adriatic, political geographical transformations, cross-border cooperation, social and spatial convergence and divergence

## **1. Introduction**

Thanks to the political transformations after the First and the Second World War and to the conflicts arising from the solution of the status of Trieste, the region of the Upper Adriatic has become a prime example for geopolitical handbooks and a real laboratory for studying contemporary geographic-political geo-political transformations (Bufon and Gosar 2007). The region is ideal for tracing new political borders, and studying the effects of the changes of the border on the borderland and its inhabitants. The process of setting boundaries in this region, from its apotheosis in the first half of this century, to its end in 1991 with the independence of Slovenia and Croatia, also saw the evolution of a particular geographic-political attitude. This attitude at the beginning had followed Ratzel's geopolitical principles, according to which the flexibility of defining borders shows directly the change in the power ratio between the countries. Later on the attitude shifted more toward modern integrative ideas about looking for harmony and the elimination of international conflicts. First, we will trace an overview of the development of this so very characteristic "contact" region with a special emphasis on the links between the geopolitical and ethnic transformations in the Upper Adriatic, and on more recent developments bringing harmony to the region.

## **2. The construction of political space in the Upper Adriatic**

The origin of the "modern" border in this region has its beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by the international treaty in Worms between the Republic of Venice and the Hapsburg Empire. Interestingly enough this border had undergone only minor adjustments until the First World War, and actually still represents the basis of the majority of the contemporary border between Italy and Slovenia. Its upper part, the Alpine segment, can be therefore set among the oldest and most stable boundaries in Europe. On the contrary, its southern part, the Adriatic boundary, has suffered through a different destiny characterised by instability. Here the historical border between Austria and Venice coincided again with a natural principle, this time a hydrographic one. It followed mainly the flows of Idrijca and Ansa in the West, so that the coast together with Grado and Monfalcone to the mouth of Timavo was ruled by the Republic of Venice, as was the coast of Istria to the south of Muggia. Until the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century both countries had agreed that, as a means of rationalisation and more precise definition of the territory, only the setting out of boundary markers on this territory was needed. At the time of Napoleon the new French rule used the same "natural" principles for drawing up borders. The border between the two political units under French rule, namely the Reign of Italy and the Illirian Province, followed the flow of Soča/Isonzo from its source to its mouth, and the watershed of Rateče, that became for the first time the marker of the national border. In spite of its "naturalness" the new border caused much discontent among the population living on both sides of the Soča river. After Napoleon's defeat Austria gained the all of northern Italy and the previous border with the Republic of Venice became an internal border and remained such until 1866, when the border between the previous Austrian Lombard-Venetian Kingdom and the District of Gorizia and Gradisca became an international border, namely between the new independent Kingdom of Italy and the Austrian Empire. This caused many disadvantages for the Friuli region; the railway connection between Trieste and Venice, and between Udine and Tarvisio, in fact, was disrupted. On the other hand, despite their "frontier" position, both Gorizia and even more Trieste began to develop more intensively. Gorizia maintained even after the First World War its role as a regional centre, since

the borders of the new region of Gorizia in Italy coincided mainly with the borders of the previous region of Gorizia in Austria, with its old eastern administrative border now the new political boundary between the Italian Kingdom and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Meanwhile its western border, which represented the historical boundary between the Republic of Venice and the Hapsburg Empire acquired the role of an internal provincial border. On the other hand Trieste, in spite of an increase in industrialisation, lost its role as a major port, which caused a slowdown in its demographic and urban growth that had earlier characterised the city (Valussi 1972). So, in spite of these border changes prior to the Second World War, the borderland social construction at the regional level remained essentially unchanged.

After the Second World War the upper part of the boundary between Italy and Yugoslavia was again set along the old historical border, based prevalently on the orographic principle. The southern section of the contemporary border between Italy and Slovenia, however, was based on a totally new criterion of "ethnic balance". According to this criterion, the border was to coincide as much as possible with the ethnic divide between Italian and Slovene speakers, while at the same time having in both countries the same number of minority group members. This created the problem of splitting up traditionally rather persistent regions such as Gorizia and Istria as well as Trieste (Klemenčič and Bufon 1991). In the case of Gorizia the new political boundary coincided with the ethnic border between the Romance (Italian and Friulan) and Slovenian populations, in the sense that the ethnically mixed town of Gorizia and the transport connections the town needed with Trieste and Udine remained in Italy. In the case of Istria and Trieste the principle of "ethnic balance" was used, since in this region there is no clear territorial ethnic border between the Romance and Slavic (Croatian and Slovenian) population (Moodie 1950). The difficulty of drawing up boundaries in this territory is clear if we consider the fact that for the most problematic segment, Trieste, a temporary solution was found in the interim as a more suitable agreement between the international powers and the local expectations was delayed. This was the creation of so-called Free Territory of Trieste divided into two zones. Zone A, including the city of Trieste, was ruled by the Anglo-American military, whereas Zone B, including Istria, came under Yugoslav rule. This situation was finally solved in 1954, when, with a slight modification of the border advantageous to Yugoslavia, the northern part of the Free Territory of Trieste (Zone A) was left to Italy, while the southern part (Zone B) was left to Yugoslavia. The validity of this border was accepted and confirmed by Italy and Yugoslavia with small modifications, at the Treaty of Osimo in 1978.

A new problem arose with the independence of Slovenia and Croatia in 1991, when the republic boundary drawn along the ethnic border between Croatian and Slovenian population became an international border. At this point a more precise and more rational definition of the border on the ground was needed as it was on the sea, namely in the Gulf of Piran; a problem not yet fully solved (Gosar and Klemenčič 1994; Gosar and Klemenčič 2000).

As we have seen the maritime zone of the Upper Adriatic offers an interesting example of interdependence between the political and ethnic border. Both of them can be even parallel or perpendicular to each other and, particularly in Istria, they trace an interesting ethno-political "cross" (Bufon 1993a; Bufon 1999). Its vertical axe came into being between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the Republic of Venice increased its power in Istria. In the second half of the 13<sup>th</sup> century it ruled

the whole western and southern coast of the peninsula of Istria, while a major part of northern Istria became Venetian in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, when the Republic of Venice obtained the land of the patriarchs of Aquileia in Muggia, Buje, and Buzet. This vertical, traditionally political axe of the "cross" of Istria is anything but a straight line, its shape is that of an inverted 'S'. The historical ethnic border on the Italian, or rather Romance population, is straighter. It includes the contemporary Slovenian coast from Koper to Dragonja, where it heads inland to Motovun, and then through Višnjan. It then runs back to the coast to Poreč, Rovinj and Pula on the western coast of Istria, while on the eastern coast it includes the hinterlands of Labin, Opatija, Rijeka, and the Islands of Kvarner. As a consequence of the Venetian "colonising", or mercantile populating policy this Italian area is characterised by various ethnic "islands" not bonded to each other, made up by sea-towns and their immediate hinterlands, on the contrary it has a more cohesive shape only between the rivers of Dragonja and Mirna. Generally speaking it can be said that the traditionally Italian ethnic area in Istria comprises a greater part of western Istria, and that the ethnic border between the Romance and Slavic ethnic groups in this area runs along the nearly straight line between Koper and Pula.

More or less during the same period between the 12<sup>th</sup> and the 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, the horizontal axe of this interesting cross of Istria, namely the ethnic border between the Slovenian and the Croatian population, took shape. Nevertheless this axe had until recently no political function. The Slovenian dense population in the area stopped at that time by the river of Dragonja and along the line north to Buzet and Rupa and it has essentially not changed since. This is rather uncommon, since, as we have already seen, this ethnic border has never been politically sustained. In this regard one thing should be stressed. Neither the vertical Romance-Slavic ethnic border nor the horizontal Croatian-Slovenian border has ever represented a true "linguistic" border between the populations of Istria. The three languages and their dialects, in fact, have merged into one another. This has occurred not only in the towns but also in the countryside creating in the areas where the three ethnic groups have been coexisting a particular dialect of Istria, that contains elements of all three different languages (Bufon 2000).

After the Republic of Venice collapsed in 1797 the whole of Istria was ruled by the Austrians, who annexed it to the Region of Kranjska. The previous political boundary in this region remained an administrative border, since western and southern Istria had a temporary provincial government in Koper. Also during the brief French rule (1805-1813) the former Venetian Istria was an independent province with its headquarters in Trieste, whereas the rest of the peninsula was part of the Croatian Province with its headquarters in Karlovac. So the old border between Austria and Venice lost its role only after the annexation of Istria to Austria, when the whole peninsula became one administrative unit with its headquarters in Pazin. Istria became a region and the seat of its regional administration was in Poreč, and the captaincy was in Rovinj. Istria, however, remained an independent province, with its headquarters in Pula. And Pula remained the capital when ruled by Italy after the First World War. The use of ethnic principles in defining borders after the Second World War showed again the contradiction of the traditional "cross" of Istria. In this sense Italy was very active in trying to revive the political function of its vertical axe. A slight influence of this axe can be seen also in the so called Morgan Line, that, from 1945 till the end of the peace conferences in 1947, divided the Anglo-American occupation region from the Yugoslav one within the controversial zone between the historical Austrian-Italian border and after the post-First World War

border between Italy and Yugoslavia. The Morgan Line ran from Osposo to the hills of Muggia and reached the sea at Debeli Rtič, dividing the frontier zone in two parts (A and B); the northern A zone also included the enclave of Pula. Its position, however, influenced the French compromise border proposal, which suggested the creation of an intermediate, politically hybrid zone, namely the Free Territory of Trieste. The southern border of this area coincided with the Morgan Line. With the end of the Free Territory of Trieste in 1954, the political function of the vertical axis of the "cross" of Istria also terminated. After a long period of vertical definition of borders in Istria, based on the Roman/Slav divide, a new era started; that of the horizontal definition of borders. This, however, sets a major part of the peninsula under the rule of one government, that of the newly constituted Croatian state. Virtually the entire peninsula, in fact, was annexed to Yugoslavia within which the ethnic border between Croats and Slovenians acquired for the first time the status of an administrative border between republics. Moreover, in 1991 the previous "no-border" horizontal line became an international border, and in December 2007 also acquired the function of the EU's external Schengen border (Bujon 2006b).

### **3. Changes in the ethnic structure within the cultural contact areas of the Upper Adriatic as a consequence of the political partition**

All these Twentieth Century border modifications following a long period of geopolitical stability, have deeply influenced the ethnic structure of the Upper Adriatic. After the First World War, in fact, the increasingly Fascist-like Italian policy of assimilation forced the traditionally ethnically mixed coastal towns to follow the new pattern of Italian "ethnic purity", and hence they become "*città' italianissime*". This in particular was the case of Trieste, where the 1910 census found 30% of the population in the commune to be Slovenian, whereas only ten years later this figure had decreased to only 8%. According to the analysis of Čermelj, after the First World War about 100 thousand Slovenians left their homes in the ethnically mixed towns of the occupied territories (Čermelj 1965). The political emigrants moved mainly to Yugoslavia, whereas the economic ones moved overseas, to both South and North America. The political emigration of Slovenian population from Trieste continued after World War Two, especially after the Yugoslav administration departed, whereas the economic emigration increased after the end of the Free Territory of Trieste and the annexation of Trieste to Italy.

The first two decades after the Second World War were very dynamic and important for Trieste. Even though the number of its inhabitants remained virtually stable (about 250 thousand inhabitants), the structure of the population changed radically. In this period, according to the best estimates, about 50 to 60 thousand people immigrated from the areas that became part of Yugoslavia, whereas on the other hand about 30 to 40 thousand people, including many Slovenians, emigrated abroad for economic reasons mainly to Australia. Also among the immigrants the ethnic structure was different: mostly they were Italians from Istria and Rijeka, but there were also from the same areas also many Croats and Slovenes from different part of Slovenia, whose ideas were pro-western and who disagreed with the Tito communist regime. Generally speaking, the shift in political boundaries and the annexation of the city to Italy influenced also the immigration flow towards Trieste and hence also the territorial origins of its inhabitants. From the comparison of the situation in 1910 and 1991, an increase of the people born in the town (from 49% to 62%) can be seen, this means a decline in the immigration dynamic, and indirectly also in the attractiveness of the town among the hinterland inhabitants.

On the other hand, we can see also a different spatial orientation. Thus the percentage of people that immigrated to Trieste from Italy increased remarkably (from 11% to 17%) as did the number of immigrants from Istria (from 8% to 14%). On the contrary, the number of immigrants from western Slovenia decreased (from 12% to only 1%), as it did the number of the immigrants from the rest of Yugoslavia (from 10% to less than 1%), and also from Austria too (from 5% to 0%). The only figure that remained nearly unchanged is that of the immigrants from Rijeka and Dalmatia (2%) and from other countries (3 to 4%).

Tab.1: The change in the structure of the population of Trieste according to birthplace, in 1910 and 1991 (%).

Birthplace	1910	1991
Trieste	49	62
Istria	8	14
Western Slovenia	12	1
Italy	11	17
Rijeka and Dalmatia	2	2
Former Yugoslavia	10	1
Austria	5	0
Other countries	3	4

Source: Authors' analysis of statistical data.

Also the census figures regarding the ethnic structure of Istria show the impact of the political transformations on the ethnic and demographic situation of the area. According to the Austrian census of 1910 there were on the whole peninsula, excluding Trieste and Rijeka, about 250 thousand inhabitants, 52% were Italians, 39% Croats, and 9% Slovenians. Whereas according to the 1921 Italian census of a total of 265 thousand inhabitants, 66% were Italians, 24% Croats, and 9% Slovenians. Thus it seems that in a mere ten-year period the number of Italians increased by 50 thousand, whereas the number of Croats decreased by 30 thousand. It is clear that the cause of such a huge modification in this ethnic structure cannot be explained solely by the emigration flow of the native population and by the immigration of Italian colonisers and state employees. According to Schiffrer, the figures of the real ethnic structure were rather distorted. His figures for 1939, in fact, are the following: about 150 thousand Italians, 97 thousand Croats, 44 thousand Slovenians, and at least 28 thousand ethnically mixed inhabitants, and nearly 10 thousand inhabitants of other origins (Schiffrer 1946). What is immediately clear from this analysis, besides the exaggerated number of Slovenians, is the difficulty of ethnic identification among the population. This can be seen in the big number of ethnically neutral inhabitants and in the author's opinion that the people living in north-west Istria between Dragonja and Limski Kanal speak a Croatian-Italian dialect, that cannot be said to be part of any of the two languages. Something similar was noticed by Rutar at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Rutar 1896). All these difficulties of ethnic identification can be seen also in the post war census in 1948, that somehow turned upside down the statistics of 1921. Even though the emigration of Italians from Istria began in this period, this phenomenon was rather limited in the very first post-war years and therefore does not justify the finding that only 80 thousand Italians remained in Istria. Obviously many of them, who were included among the Italians twenty years before, changed their minds more or less "voluntarily". The real "exodus" of the Italian population began after 1947 and lasted for a decade; by 1961 the number of Italians in Istria had decreased to 20 thousand, thus about 100 thousand native Italians, or one third of the whole population, had joined the emigration flow. This gap has been only

partly filled with new immigrants from the rest of Yugoslavia. On the other side of the border the majority of the emigrants from Istria was settled in the area between Trieste and Monfalcone, the area which has been historically densely inhabited by the Slovenians. Thus a trend towards a "normalisation" on both sides of the border is evident, which means that the political and ethnic border should better coincide. The north-west coast of Trieste mainly inhabited by Slovenians should have become from the ethnic point of view "Italian", whereas the western coast of Istria inhabited by Italians should have become "Yugoslav" (Bufon 2003).

The influence of "external" factors on ethnic identification and self-identification is also evident in the later movements of the Italian population in Istria. According to the statistics their number, in fact, had by 1981 decreased to only 13 thousand. On the contrary, in 1991, when there was a big political and economic crisis in Yugoslavia, the number of Italians increased again to 21 thousand (Juri 1991; Repolusk 1990). Usually the biggest changes in ethnic structure occurred in the traditionally ethnically mixed urban centres, to which Italians, Slovenians, Croats, and people of other origins had immigrated during the Austrian period. In this area a remarkable decrease in the German population, and in other more distant populations can be noticed, as it can be seen a decrease in the native population, depending on the nationality. Thus in Trieste a decrease in the Slovenian population can be seen and at the same time the Italian population, which has been traditionally the majority, has increased. In Koper, Pula, and Rijeka the formerly dominant Italians have withdrawn, and have been partly substituted by the local Slovenian or Croatian population, and by immigrants from the less developed regions and republics of former Yugoslavia (Gosar 1993). For example, more than 30 % of all the immigrants that have moved to Koper were from these areas.

Tab.2: The changes in the ethnic structure of selected towns in the Upper Adriatic between 1910 and 1991 (%).

Town	Year	Italians	Slovenians	Croats and other Yugoslavia nations	Germans and other nations
Gorizia (Gorica)	1910	44,8	40,0	1,2	14,0
	1991*	77,0	14,0	-	9,0
Trieste (Trst)	1910	64,7	24,8	1,0	9,5
	1991*	84,0	10,0	3,0	3,0
Koper (Capodistria)	1910	78,2	18,5	1,3	1,9
	1991	2,2	82,4	15,4	-
Pula (Pola)	1910	52,0	4,9	23,2	19,9
	1991	8,1	1,9	88,0	2,0
Rijeka (Fiume)	1910	48,6	4,7	26,7	19,9
	1991	1,8	1,6	95,7	0,9

\*Estimation; names in brackets are indicating that minority topography is not recognized officially.

Source: Bufon 1992; Perselli 1993.

While the census figures show clear trends in ethnic identification and the influences of the political situation, they are not very useful in assessing the "real" dimension of the ethnic structure, given that the ethnic minority groups often behave like "submerged" linguistic communities and their "visibility" depends primarily on their degree of social integration, i.e. on the protection measures taken. From more accurate surveys it is evident that in Slovenian Istria only 73% of the Italian speaking population identify themselves as Italians, and in Croatia this figure is even lower (Bogliun Debeljuh 1989 and 1994; Milani Kruljac 1990). This difference between the objective and subjective ethnic identification occurs to an even greater

extent among the Slovenians in Trieste, whose degree of formal protection is rather inferior. Here only 40% of the people who can speak Slovenian or can understand it identify themselves explicitly as Slovenians (Bufon 1992).

#### **4. Building harmony in the Upper Adriatic borderlands**

The contemporary image of the Upper Adriatic from a political-geographic point of view is thus completely different from the old image. Ethnic-political transformations in this area have erased to a great extent the formerly persistent ethnic borders. Even though cultural spaces have lost many of their traditional traits they still influence the shape of the specific territorial identity, which can be seen in the people who have moved into these places from somewhere else. Moreover, the emigration of native peoples has widened the space of original regional identity and has been influencing the forms of spatial bonds within a wider regional context (Klemenčič 1993). In this way especially the bonds between Trieste and Istria have become stronger, since in and around Trieste now lives the majority of the Istrian native Italians, who are still very bonded to their land of origin. Trieste consequently is becoming, in spite of the two borders that separate it from the rest of Istria, the new "Caput Istriae", and it is likely that this function will become even stronger in the future, since Istria is devoid of a specific regional centre. Considering that contemporary processes of integration follow the principle of "unity in diversity", it is likely that Trieste can assume again its regional function in this area, on condition that at the same time its multicultural tradition is revived (Bufon 2002).

It is a common rule for all "new" borderlands that after the elimination of political and ideological hindrances, they are the most receptive to new forms of integration between the two neighbouring countries (Bufon 1994a and 1996). This search for a wider co-operation derives from the process of overcoming the conflicts caused by the division of traditionally homogeneous administrative, social, economic and cultural spaces, and it is becoming quite evident also in the case of the »three-border« area of Trieste and Istria (Sanguin 1996; Zupancic and Repolusk 1995). "Old" borders - and the northern part of the current Italo-Slovene border is a good example of this - are based, in fact, on the "old" concepts of defining borders, that coincide with the so called natural, usually orographic, boundaries, whereas the "new" borders often penetrate in urban and densely populated areas, where the communication among the inhabitants used to be intense (Bufon 1993b; Klemenčič and Bufon 1994).

This is particularly the case of the Gorizia region. Here, the area of the Goriška Brda/Collio was cut in two and thus lively social and economic relations between the Goriška Brda and Friulian centres, representing the main outlet for the Brda agricultural products, were interrupted. Moreover, the new border hampered the access from the major part of the Goriška Brda to the villages of Solkan and Šempeter, where a new urban centre, an »alternative« to the town of Gorizia, was developing, making thus the Goriška Brda a dead enclave within its own state territory. On the other hand, the very birth of the town of Nova Gorica (»*The New Gorizia*«) was unusual not because it meant the construction of a »twin« town along the border, a relatively frequent phenomenon, but rather because it had to grow virtually overnight for a precise purpose: that of joining the two villages of Solkan and Šempeter into a larger and more attractive urban centre which would have to overshadow the »old« Gorizia.

These examples show that the border, drawn between Italy and Yugoslavia in 1947, opened up two possible, but extremely different perspectives: on the one hand, the strengthening of the dividing character of the border and the limitation of cross-border relations would provoke a gradual disintegration of the social and economic tissue of the border area, but on the other, the opening of the border and the promotion of traditional local ties would contribute to the integration and the development of the two border areas. It is not clear to what extent this dilemma influenced the drawing up of that part of the Peace Treaty in which the two parties are required to jointly solve certain »technical« problems regarding water and power supply. Nevertheless, the important fact is that already in 1949 the Italian and Yugoslav governments agreed to make the boundary more permeable, initially only with regard to the cross-border traffic of those farmers whose land remained on the other side of the border. But from 1955 onwards they agreed to include all local cross-border transit within a range of 10 km either side of the border. During the same year local trade within the same area was greatly liberalized. The effects of these agreements were extraordinary and undoubtedly contributed to the amicable settlement of other open questions and to the creation of a more favorable political climate both at a local and national level. Towards the end of the sixties, after the abolition of entry visas for international traffic and the stabilization of political relations, the Italo-Yugoslav border became known as one of the »most open« boundaries between Western and Communist Europe, which was undoubtedly true considering the substantially less permeable borders between other neighbor states with profoundly different political systems. But the openness of the current Italo-Slovene border, particularly with regard to local relations, was even greater than that of many other »stable« Western European cross-border regions (Bufon 1995). Intense local relations may not be so important from a macro-economic point of view, but they undoubtedly contribute to the shaping and development of more integrated cross-border regions.

In this way, not only the »berlinization« of both major urban centres along the border was avoided, but the adopted policy also deeply influenced cross-border social and economic transactions. Cross-border trade stemmed on the local level from the rather asymmetric political division: in the Gorizia region Italy obtained only 8% of the territory of the former Province of Gorizia, but 74% percent of its population and 52% of commercial businesses. It was like an apple cut in two parts: one smaller, but containing the core, the other greater, but without the core. The local border agreements permitted this »apple« to link up again, and therefore it is not surprising that after the liberalization of local cross-border traffic in 1955, the latter increased in only five years by nearly 900%. The intensity of the local cross-border traffic has undoubtedly influenced the shaping of a particular and complementary type of economic border space around the towns of Gorizia and Trieste, where the Slovenian area attracts the inhabitants of the Italian side with its cheaper petrol and food-stuff, restaurants and duty-free shops, as well as its casinos, but also with its better preserved environment, while the Italian border area is more attractive for the Slovene neighbours because of its job and shopping opportunities. A particular phenomenon, which far exceeds the local cross-border relations, is represented by the Trieste and, on a minor scale, Tarvisio daily shopping fair (Minghi 1994). The former has known its »golden age« in the seventies and eighties thanks to the Yugoslav, and particularly Croatian, shoppers, the latter, instead, has always been an Austrian target.

On the other hand, several researchers (Sussi 1973; Delli Zotti 1982) have revealed

the importance of social cross-border transactions. Investigations revealed that economic ties could develop only when local personal cross-border contacts had been established, based on cultural homogeneity, kindships and friendships. On the basis of these contacts several social contacts and other events, such as sports and cultural, could first develop. Only then, could political relations develop. Significantly, these were strengthened and finally »normalized« in the late 1970s. It seems that particularly knowledge of both languages and national or ethnic intertwining of the border population provide for more sophisticated and intense forms of social and cultural cooperation and integration. Traditionally as much as two thirds of local cross-border »public« contacts were maintained by the Slovene ethnic community in Italy, a minority which is present along the entire Italo-Slovene borderland (Bufon 1994b). This situation has only partially changed after the independence of Slovenia, even though there are now increasing efforts to give a more structured frame to these extraordinarily intense local cross-border contacts and create a new Euroregion in the Upper Adriatic, which will most probably be generated by different areas of interest such as the northern border sector, the Gorizia sector, and the Trieste sector, which could also act as the leading Euroregion for the Istrian three-border area.

But besides an increasing process of re-integration of the Upper Adriatic within the frame of the European Union and the established Schengen space, there is also a process of social and spatial dis-integration on the Slovenian-Croatian border, showing how influential remain to be wider political-geographical transformations on this interesting European contact area. Recent investigations (Bufon 2008) have revealed that expectations for future developments in cross-border cooperation are quite different among Slovene respondents at the border with Italy and Croatia: positive expectations prevail on the former, whilst negative expectations persist on the latter, as shown in Table 3. Nevertheless, both border areas are sharing the same level of potential social cross-border connection, as 81% to 83% of respondents at the border with Italy and Croatia indicated that they have friends living on the other side of the border. Significantly different is, instead, the structure of functional cross-border traffic, both in terms of intensity and motivations (see Tab. 4). On the Slovenian-Italian border, as much as 19% of the population is used to cross the border daily or at least weekly, whilst those types of visits involve only 5% of the population on the Slovenian-Croatian border. Moreover, in this border area not less than 18% of the population never cross the border in comparison with only 7% at the border with Italy. For what the motivations for cross-border movements is concerned, shopping prevails at the border with Italy (48%), whilst the same percentage goes on the border with Croatia for recreation motivations.

Tab. 3: Recent convergence and divergence processes in the Upper Adriatic – different expectations for the development of cross-border cooperation among Slovene respondents at the border with Italy and Croatia (in % of respondents).

How have cross-border relations changed after Slovenia joined the EU?

	SLO/I	SLO/CRO
Better	36,0	6,0
Same	55,0	29,0
Worse	6,0	62,0

How will cross-border relations change after the Slovenian entrance into the Schengen space?

	SLO/I	SLO/CRO
Better	49,0	14,0
Same	42,0	29,0
Worse	4,0	52,0

Source: Bufon, 2008.

Tab. 4: Recent convergence and divergence processes in the Upper Adriatic – different structure of cross-border visits among Slovene respondents at the border with Italy and Croatia (in % of respondents)

#### Intensity of cross-border visits

	SLO/I	SLO/CRO
Every day	7,2	1,6
At least once a week	12,0	3,6
At least once a month	33,5	20,2
At least once a year	40,2	56,7
Never	7,1	17,9

#### Motivations for cross-border visits

	SLO/I	SLO/CRO
Work	5,6	3,6
Supply	48,2	8,7
Visits to relatives/friends	17,5	15,5
Visits of cultural events	4,0	2,4
Recreation/Excursion	14,3	48,4

Source: Bufon, 2008.

## 5. Conclusions

The Upper Adriatic is a region of intense cross-border intertwining on a cultural, social, economic and political level. The diffused practice of bilingualism has been in recent times reinforced by developments in local cross-border relations and cross-border information exchange produced by the neighbouring mass media, in which border minorities have taken an important role in creating contact opportunities.

This area provides an interesting illustration of an apparently paradoxical process within borderlands: where the greater the conflicts in political partitioning of a previous homogeneous administrative, cultural and economic region, the greater have been opportunities for such a divided area to develop into an integrated cross-border region, once the appropriate conditions are given. Reflecting on the border landscape concept on the basis of this case study, it becomes clear that the political or economic "macro" approach in studying cross-border regions is not sufficient. The real qualities of these regions, however, may be found when local cultural and social elements of cross-border relations are taken into account. This great variety of micro-transactions, supported by the border population, is the result of its spatial mobility in satisfying daily needs regarding basic social functions such as shopping, work, leisure time, or even education. But they are also the result of the activity of the border population in maintaining traditional cultural links very often were forged in the relatively stable period preceding political partition. Hence, the study of border regions undoubtedly brings additional aspects to bear on the standard theory of centre-periphery relations, while opening up a range of new problems and possibilities (Bufon 2006a). Many of these are becoming increasingly more topical in today's world, as we try to enhance our mutual understanding in the culturally rich

and diverse European space. The geography of border landscapes in its social and cultural dimension is thus definitely assuming an important role in the process of "humanisation" of the traditional geographical approach to borders and border conflict resolution (Rumley and Minghi 1991).

The Upper Adriatic remains therefore a very interesting area subject to continuous geopolitical transformations. Since this area is now divided into three states it is fast becoming a new and special kind of European borderland or »Euro-region« where both convergence and divergence processes could be studied, providing thus continuous stimuli for boundary researchers. Moreover, the states involved in this region should see that their vested interests are best served by allowing it to remain an area of international and multiethnic integration and co-operation into the future. The history of the Upper Adriatic region proves, after all, that it is much more difficult to divide than to bond it together.

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## **THE CHANGEABLE POLITICAL MAP OF THE UPPER ADRIATIC REGION: FROM CONFLICT TO HARMONY**

### ***Summary***

The paper will present a geopolitical and political geographical overview of the Upper Adriatic region as an area of contact between different cultural, social, economic and political entities, producing potential of conflicts, particularly in the period of growing nationalism and emerging nation-state formulation in this region. The first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century represented a classic example of geopolitical conflict through two World Wars and their related Peace Conferences that produced several versions of political organization of the Upper Adriatic region and a huge number of border proposals. Conflicts arising from the mid-century solution of the so-called Trieste question transformed the Upper Adriatic region into an example in geopolitical handbooks and a real laboratory of contemporary political geographic transformations. Changing geopolitical patterns have also produced considerable modifications in the political, social and ethnic construction of the Upper Adriatic region, driving neighbouring national policies to subordinate the ethno-linguistic structure to the existing state situation. The process of creating new international boundaries in the region actually ended in 1991 with the establishment of an independent Slovenia and Croatia. In this long period of geopolitical transformations in the Upper Adriatic region an evolution of the political geographic attitude can also be detected. Early on it followed Ratzel's geopolitical principles, according to which the flexibility of defining borders directly indicated the change in the power ratio between neighbouring countries, but latterly it has taken into account to a greater extent modern integrative ideas concerning an increasing interest in looking for harmony and the elimination of international conflicts. Greater attention has thus been given to the political geography of «everyday life», inter-ethnic relations and cross-border contacts. Research in the area has shown that the «new» borderlands of the Upper Adriatic region are more receptive to integration, because they are seeking to overcome conflicts caused by the division of traditionally homogeneous administrative, social, economic and cultural spaces. The potential advantages deriving from sharing common spaces among different and hitherto rival ethnic groups on a local level are emerging following the decline or even elimination of political and ideological hindrances on the state level. Since the Upper Adriatic region is now divided among three countries - Italy, Slovenia and Croatia - it is becoming a new and special type of European borderland which will surely increasingly become an object of study for many scholars interested in its social and spatial problems. Moreover, it is now in the best interests of these countries that the region should continue to develop as an area of international and inter-ethnic integration and co-operation, providing thus a possible model of coexistence practices for other European contact areas. After all, the history of the Upper Adriatic region proves that it is much more difficult to divide the region than to bond it together.

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