

Territorial Quality of Life: A case study in the cross-border area Trieste-Koper-Istria

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Abstract: *This paper illustrates the Territorial Quality of Life (TQoL) measurement approach and its application in the cross-border area Trieste-Koper-Istria, a spin-off activity of the Espon QoL project in cooperation with the Slovene EU Presidency. Territorial quality of life is defined as the capability of living beings to survive and flourish in a place, thanks to the economic, social and ecological conditions that support life in that place. To measure the different dimensions of quality of life, a co-creative and deliberative approach is applied, engaging citizens, experts and policy makers in co-deciding what, why and how quality of life should be measured to promote a good life. The most crucial factor in this work was the citizens' engagement, involving three main elements: living lab focus groups, digital contest and quality of life survey app. Selected key findings on the quality of life in the tri-national border region point to very wide disparities in quality of life between places.*

Keywords: *Quality of life, territorial Policy Agenda, cross-border services, citizen-centric approach.*

Sommario: *L'articolo illustra l'approccio di misurazione della Qualità della Vita Territoriale (TQoL) e la sua applicazione all'area transfrontaliera Trieste-Capodistria-Istria, un'attività spin-off del progetto Espon QoL in collaborazione con la presidenza slovena dell'Ue. La qualità della vita territoriale è definita come la capacità degli esseri viventi di sopravvivere e prosperare in un luogo, grazie alle condizioni economiche, sociali ed ecologiche che sostengono la vita in quel luogo. Per misurare le diverse dimensioni della qualità della*

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vita, viene applicato un approccio co-creativo e deliberativo, coinvolgendo cittadini, esperti e responsabili politici nella co-decisione di cosa, perché e come la qualità della vita dovrebbe essere misurata per consentire una buona esistenza. L'aspetto più cruciale di questo lavoro è stato il coinvolgimento dei cittadini, che si è articolato in tre momenti principali: living lab focus group, concorso digitale e app per l'indagine sulla qualità della vita. I risultati chiave selezionati sulla qualità della vita nella regione di confine tri-nazionale evidenziano forti disparità nella qualità della vita tra i vari luoghi.

Parole chiave: *Qualità della vita, Agenda politica territoriale, servizi transfrontalieri, approccio incentrato sui cittadini.*

Foreword

Discussions on how to measure well-being and quality of life have led to several important initiatives over the past 15 years by the European Commission, the OECD, the United Nations and others (see the final bibliography). Following up on this, Espon² has developed an innovative approach which reflects the territorial diversity of quality of life, as well as the citizen-centred, subjective and time-bound understanding of quality of life, including co-creation and a proactive engagement of citizens and local actors.

Espon defines territorial quality of life as the capability of living beings to survive and flourish in a place, thanks to the economic, social and ecological conditions that support life in that place³. This general definition has been further translated into (a) different thematic spheres, (b) different conceptual dimensions, and (c) a deliberative approach. Taken together it allows for more

2 Espon QoL - Quality of life measurements and methodology is a project funded by the Espon 2020 programme, financed by the European regional development fund, by EU member states, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and Switzerland. The study aimed to produce evidence about the challenges, achievements and development trends of European regions and cities in relation to Quality of Life (QoL) as well as to deliver guidance for local, regional and national level policy makers to promote the integration of QoL in the development and implementation of territorial development strategies (<https://www.espon.eu/programme/projects/espon-2020/applied-research/quality-of-life>).

3 The approach includes all living species, not only humans, recognising the intrinsic value of nature and ecological health and flourishing as a relevant dimension of territorial QoL.

nuanced and place-specific understandings of quality of life, which cover all essential features and reflect the subjective and time-bound character of quality of life (Di Biaggio and Sessa 2021).

Thematic spheres of quality of life

Quality of life covers a wide range of thematic spheres. To ensure a broad thematic coverage, the Espon definition includes three main spheres:

Personal sphere: personal health and safety needs and flourishing aspirations.

Socio-economic sphere: economic well-being and social and policy factors that support survival and flourishing of all people living in the place.

Ecological sphere: quality of the environment and ecological flourishing as a key aspect of quality of life.

Conceptual dimensions of quality of life

To fully understand the dynamics within of each of the three spheres, the Espon definition differentiates in each of them between three conceptual dimensions:

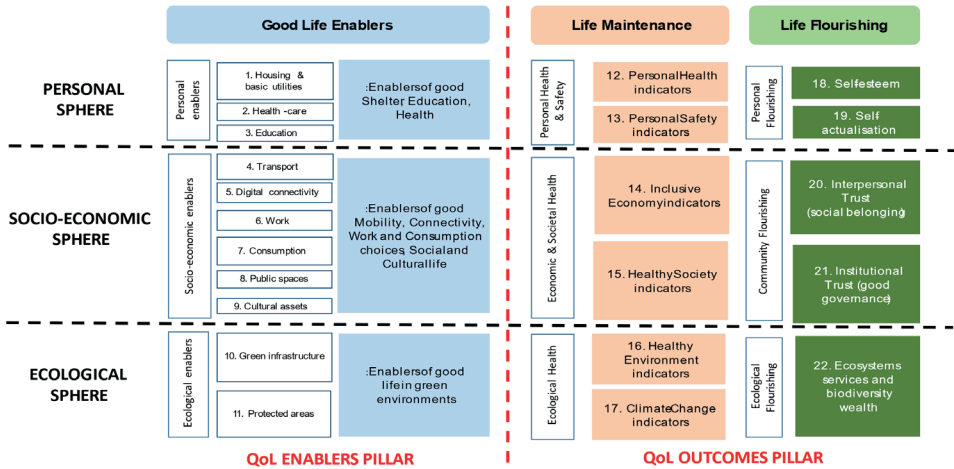
Good life enablers: place-specific preconditions for each of the three thematic spheres.

Life maintenance: healthy personal life, healthy economy and healthy environment as outcome of a good quality of life.

Life flourishing: fulfilment of personal aspirations, community flourishing and ecological flourishing as outcome of a good quality of life.

The following conceptual map illustrates in further detail how the thematic spheres and conceptual dimension come together to provide a comprehensive framework for the definition of quality of life in terms of enablers and outcomes.

Fig. 1. Territorial quality of life measurement system (conceptual map)



Co-creative and deliberative approach

The understanding of quality of life – in terms of how to describe the various boxes of the conceptual map and which weight to give to them – varies according to people’s perceptions, between places and also over time. To capture that, Espon has developed a co-creative and deliberative approach engaging citizens, experts and policy makers in co-deciding what, why and how quality of life should be measured to enable a good life. This citizen-centric and place-based focus makes the Espon approach unique in comparison to other international approaches measuring quality of life. The key to this approach is *Territorial Quality of Life Living Labs*.

A *Territorial Quality of Life Living Lab* builds a policy innovation milieu where experts from competent and trusted institutions (departments of national, regional and local governments, statistical agencies, universities, business associations, civil society organisations and NGOs) work together with citizens (small groups of self-selected active citizens or randomly selected citizen juries). In cooperation, through co-creation and lateral thinking they jointly define quality of life. For each sphere of quality of life, they define their shared understanding and priorities and test possible indicators. In an ideal case the

living lab remains active beyond the analysis of the state of quality of life in the area to monitor and evaluate possible improvement or changes. In this process people are actors of change and not just consumers of policies.

The QoL conceptual map developed by Espon supports the process providing a universal framework with various spheres and domains for measuring QoL. It can be used across different territorial levels, with the selection of indicators (objective and subjective) based on the citizen-centric approach. It allows experimentation and is flexible enough to accommodate people's perceptions and different places. The map is complemented with an open Excel tool – the *Territorial Quality of Life Dashboard* – which is essential for capturing the selected data and indicators in a structured, comparable and operational format. It also allows for benchmarking places based on tailored comparisons and for looking deeper into characteristics of a selected territory.

Quality of Life in the functional cross-border area Trieste-Koper-Istria

The Espon approach to quality of life can be used at various geographical levels also looking at functional areas rather than just administrative regions. The Slovene EU Presidency in cooperation with Espon engaged in the further development and deepening of the approach to place-based and citizen-centric quality of life assessments and applied it to the tri-national functional cross-border region of Coastal-Karst Region in Slovenia, county of Istria in Croatia and Trieste in Italy.

The most crucial factor in this work was the citizens' engagement, involving three main elements: living lab focus groups, digital contest and quality of life survey app. These are different ways for eliciting quality of life experiences and perceptions of the people, by asking them 1) their opinions directly in small group discussions, 2) to express their life experiences by submitting photos in a digital contest, representing what they perceive as distinctive features of living in the cross-border area, and 3) of answering questions administered through a qualitative survey app, telling what are the best and worst aspects of living in the area and explaining why (with concise statements). The results of these innovative practices can be used to prioritise policy actions and weight

the indicators in the dashboard tool, producing composite indexes that better reflect the quality of life aspirations of the people.

Selected key findings on the quality of life in this tri-national border region point to very wide disparities in quality of life between places. Although it is a relatively small territory the regional disparities are almost as great as within the EU. While the Coastal-Karst Region enjoys an overall good quality of life (in the European context it ranks 192 out of 1442 regions), the quality of life is lower in Trieste (ranked 811) and Istria (ranked 1219) (Espon 2021). The considerable disparities in quality of life in the tri-national area are visible across different dimensions.

Quality of Life is also linked to the integration of these three regions allowing people to enjoy the amenities on the other sides of the borders. Dominant perceptions of the most relevant QoL aspects (positive or negative) revolved around the good life enablers, such as cross-border services of general interest (e.g. healthcare), cross-border labour markets and mobility (public transport services) and cross-border environmental commons.

Accordingly, cross-border mobility infrastructure, cross-border public transport services, as well as cross-border services of general interest (e.g. in the field of health care) are important to the quality of life in the area. Language abilities are an essential precondition to be able to mingle with people from neighbouring countries and make use of cross-border services.

The ecological sphere of quality of life is another obvious area for cross-border integration and collaboration, as factors such as air or water pollution spill-over effects do not stop at national borders. One important environmental common for Coastal-Karst-Istria-Trieste cross-border area is the sea. In the ecological sphere discussion the need has been emphasised for a common approach to sea-level rise vulnerability challenges, the quality of coastal waters, coastal tourism and water mobility services.

The voice of young citizens in the cross-border area

Focus group activities have been organised with small groups of students from the universities in each of the countries within the cross-border area – University of Trieste (I), University of Primorska (SLO) and University of Pula (HR).

- The aim of the discussion with the participants was to investigate and discuss quality of life within the area, starting from the perceived needs and expectations in the whole cross-border area. This discussion was replicated in all three student focus groups, in order to gather the different points of view from students living in Italy, Slovenia and Croatia respectively.
- In all focus groups the discussion addressed quality of life issues from:
- The perspective of everyday life challenges of living in each area and in particular the needs or expectations associated to cross-border activities (e.g. mobility, health, leisure). From this perspective the first two territorial QoL dimensions – good life enablers and life maintenance – turned out to be most important. The students were asked to highlight the best and the worst quality of life aspects they perceive, and to reflect on what should be measured, if possible suggesting tangible and measurable elements that could be later used to help selecting indicators.
- The perspective of students’ life aspirations to flourish, focusing on the third territorial QoL dimension – personal, community and ecological flourishing domains. From this perspective the students were asked to reflect on fundamental values and aspirations they would like to see realised, and the connection with the place in which they live and cross-border life opportunities.
- The overall conclusions of the three focus groups are the following⁴:
- Some common challenges have been highlighted across all focus groups: the need to improve public transport connections (especially with the hinterland in all regions) and to address the issues of rising prices (especially housing) due to tourism development.
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- Generally, Slovene students do not perceive the border between Italy and

4 It should be highlighted that the focus group in Koper was a group of students in the first year of studies who mainly came from different parts of Slovenia and abroad (Croatia, Serbia). Consequently, they have limited local experience of the area. Moreover, Covid-19 restrictions were in force, so it was hard for some of them to give an opinion on life maintenance and life flourishing aspects of the quality of life.

- Slovenia which is regularly crossed by majority of the participants as a barrier, while the opposite applies to the border between Slovenia and Croatia.
- Due to the rather long distance from Pula to the Slovene-Italian border, Croatian students do not gravitate towards Slovenia and Italy on a regular basis but rather focus their activities on the vicinity of Pula and Istria in general. In addition, poor public transport, expensive tolls, and long waiting times on the borders are seen as obstacles. However, they are interested in participating in potential future joint cross-border programmes and activities with Slovene and Italian students such as sporting and educational events and workshops.
 - Italian students were highlighting the need and willingness to learn Slovene, while Slovenes are also eager to learn Italian since they believe this would help overcome the language barrier.
 - A selection of views and messages from the participants are listed below.

Trieste focus group (September 14, 2021 – 8 participants)

Identity

I was born and raised on the Karst plateau, so it has always been normal to live on the border. A strange experience was indeed the closure of the border during lockdown. The border has never really been a barrier, on the contrary the linguistic and cultural differences that coexist in the area are positive factors, involving a greater openness of individuals towards each other. In fact, cross-border citizens prefer jobs and personal development with an international dimension. There is also an identity issue whereby, even if you have a specific national citizenship, you do not feel that you belong to a single nation. (*Nasja*)

As for how I see living in the future in the cross-border area, there is an identity element to consider, i.e. the feeling of belonging and not belonging to a specific nation or culture. A critical issue is the population ageing in the area, the lack of stimulating alternatives for young people and as a consequence their increasingly turning towards extremism and fragility. I would like to be able to work with local people and those who pass through this territory (migrants, students, etc.), to make them truly participate in territorial development. (*Francesca*)

Speaking different languages is obviously an obstacle, it would be useful to teach Slovene in all schools, not only in those for minorities, to have a wider mutual exchange. I suggest orienting all future projects on the integration of all aspects of these territories, from mobility to language, to cultural and educational aspects to make future generations grow with a European rather than national identity – identifying themselves first as Europeans and then as Italians, Slovenes etc. (*Federico*)

Mobility services

A positive aspect of cross-border life is the possibility of having a variety of alternative cultural experiences. While a major obstacle to improving the quality of life is public transport which does not cover the territory sufficiently or efficiently. Mobility in the area remains highly dependent on the car or other personal means of transport. (*Mong Kha*)

One priority is the improvement of territorial mobility also in Italy, given that it is very difficult to move even between Verona, Gorizia and Trieste. Improving territorial transport would also mean supporting integrated production chains and job opportunities present throughout the territory. (*Annachiara*)

Quality of life opportunities and challenges

I have always living in the cross-border area, my family origin being from Istria, so I have always perceived myself as a cross-border citizen. The border is mainly crossed for buying petrol, meat and some services at better prices. At the time of Yugoslavia there was even a saying about crossing the border to go shopping. In Friuli-Venezia Giulia there is an excellent quality of life, the cities are lively and the region is very rich, not only from an economic and employment point of view, but also thanks to a rich cultural and environmental heritage. On the border there are many on-going cultural initiatives, also rediscovering past heritages. The border is an opportunity to give expression to different cultures and create an original identity. A negative aspect is the national governance, as the central government does not understand the peculiarities of the territory. Above all, the migration issue which is a very urgent problem in the area being on the Balkan route, is not adequately managed. (*Giacomo*)

One of the positive aspects of the quality of life in the cross-border area is the wealth of possibilities that this area offers: you can cross the border for

sporting events and activities, often meeting with people who speak another language. To understand and deal with different linguistic and cultural minorities brings a greater mental openness. Slow and sustainable tourism would be a very positive development opportunity for the area. An obstacle, on the other hand, is the difficulty able tourism would be a very positive development opportunity for the area. An obstacle, on the other hand, is the difficulty in finding information also due to the language barrier, as there is no border language, a common language to communicate fluently. (*Giovanna*)

Two areas need improvement: work, and access to health services. For employment opportunities, it is not so easy to access the labour market across the border. It would be advisable to create intermediaries that support the path to search and find a job in the cross-border territory. Similarly, ease of access to cross-border health services should be improved. Language is certainly a barrier that limits the fluidity of information but also the skills necessary to work across the border. (*Adriana*)

Koper focus group (October 13, 2021– 9 participants)

The border with Croatia is definitely one of the biggest barriers in this cross-border area. This was especially evident last year when it was impossible to cross the border. My father as a daily commuter, who works in Croatia, had to stay in Croatia for months due to Covid-19 restrictions. Now it is better, but the epidemic really had negative impact on daily life. It is different from the border with Italy, where the border does not present an evident barrier. Also,

I gravitate more toward Italy than toward Croatia. The biggest positive aspect of this multicultural area is collaboration with other nations. I am a member of the Slovene minority and have a clear insight of this aspect. Connections between Rijeka, Koper and Trieste are quite strong. I am active in a youth organisation with other young representatives of Slovene minorities. We organise various events and participate in projects (e.g. collaboration with the University of Trieste). Mostly I spend time in Koper, Izola and Piran, and I only cross the border when I visit my relatives. (*Mateo*)

I come from the municipality of Nova Gorica and I am used to crossing the border regularly. The trend of shopping in Italy is still present since the

quality of some products there is higher. Living in the cross-border area and having a possibility of crossing the border with no restrictions is a big opportunity for learning more about new things, cultures. It definitely contributes to the quality of life. Last year the restrictions due to Covid-19 mostly impacted the way of life of daily migrants – my grandmother who still works in Italy – and that represented a big problem for her. Considering mobility and public transport, it is great in Koper and the connections between the bigger coastal towns (Izola, Piran, Portorož) are good. The problem is crowds in the summertime when it takes way longer to travel along the coast. (*Luka*)

I also live close to Nova Gorica and cross the border regularly. Even when I go to Koper, I go through Italy since it takes less time to travel this way. The closure of the border made it impossible to go shopping in Italy and we are used to doing so since some things are cheaper there. In the same way, the Italians use the opportunity to buy petrol in Slovenia since the prices are lower here. (*Tadej*)

When I compare quality of life in Koper to that in Serbia, where I come from, it is quite higher here. The only thing that makes me feel uncomfortable here is the language barrier. I am still learning Slovene. I do understand it, but I am not very comfortable speaking it yet and I have experienced occasions that made me feel unwelcome due to the fact I do not speak Slovene. Apart from that, Slovenia is very organised and cares about the environment, which is very well taken care of. I decided to study in Koper because many friends from my hometown told me it is more affordable to live here than in Maribor or Ljubljana. Besides that, I was told that people here are more welcoming also due to the proximity of Italy and Croatia which makes this area considerably multicultural. (*Vukašin*).

Trieste as the biggest city in this cross-border area definitely represents a pull factor. Work opportunities and possibilities for studies are better when you live in that area. I visit Trieste and Udine to go out or visit my mother, who works in Italy. It is possible to use public transport (combination of bus and train). Compared to the Croatian border, it is way easier to cross the Italian border and it is also closer to Koper. One can feel the impact of Italian culture in Koper and its surroundings, for example in the architecture of buildings – the city centre of Koper reminds one of Italian cities. The area of Koper is walkable, and if I don't go by foot, I cycle. I would be interested in going on a student exchange, also in Italy since I would like to learn Italian. (*Petar*)

I moved to Koper to study. Unfortunately, it is hard to express my experience of the area since everything was closed last year. It was not difficult to find an apartment last year and the rent is not that high considering the fact it is in the city centre. Public transport is good between the coastal cities but connections to the hinterland are not good enough. (*Urška*)

I come from another part of Slovenia (Celje) and I recently moved to Prade (settlement in the Municipality of Koper). Considering public transport, I must say you cannot count on being on time when you use it. Also, the connections at the weekends are rare. I believe it would be travel around with a car. (*Dominika*)

Pula focus group (October 13, 2021 – 7 participants)

I think here the most important challenges to address for better quality of life are housing and employment. For housing, it is difficult to get a loan because a lot of people do not have a permanent job. Then, loans are huge, while salaries are low – and due to that a lot of people choose renting. On the other hand, renting is not a perfect solution either – many owners force tenants to leave the apartments during the tourist seasons so that they can rent them to tourists in order to earn more money. As for the working opportunities, I personally do not plan to look for a job in Italy or Slovenia. In my opinion, it is more important to find the way to achieve higher standards here, to put the focus on decreasing economic disparities within the cross-border area so that the population in every part of the area has equal conditions and opportunities for employment. (*Isabella*)

I am generally very happy with living in Pula, and even if I go somewhere else to live, I will definitely return back to Pula because, as far as I am concerned, life here is much better than anywhere else. Of course, there are probably better job opportunities and salaries elsewhere, e.g., in Germany. However, the quality of life here is incomparable considering the social aspects and healthy environment (vicinity of the sea, air quality, etc.). In addition to housing, in my opinion, the essential challenge to solve is to improve health care services and raise wages in health care. The health care services are very poor –there are long waiting lists for even regular checks in hospitals. As far

as I know, medical staff are underpaid, and that influences how, medical staff are underpaid, and that influences their job satisfaction, motivation and consequently the overall services. (*Josip*)

I came from Osijek to Pula to study. The advantages of living here are that I live near the sea, fresh air... On the other hand, life in Pula is much more expensive than in Osijek. It would be good to introduce some discounts for students here, or to open a cafe, a club or something similar in a student centre with affordable prices for students. This year, I also faced the problem of finding an apartment to rent. Most of the owners didn't want to rent me an apartment before December due to the prolonged tourist season. (*Marin*)

For transport, while public transport in the cities is quite well organised, it is not the case with the public transport from the cities to suburban and hinterland areas. Regarding student life, it would be good to have more programmes for students and young people such as workshops, places for hanging out with colleagues and peers. I think there are more similar events in Koper, for example, and I would like to attend them. It would be good to have organised transport and more announcements of such events in Slovenia and Italy. As for the working opportunities, I think we focus too much on tourism and renting apartments to visitors while the other sectors are neglected, there is an urgent need to diversify the economy. (*Lara*)

Although we have slightly higher incomes here in Istria than in the rest of Croatia, when compared to Koper and Trieste that is not the case, our standards are lower. Despite higher incomes, life here is pretty expensive and that is in terms of everything – renting, tolls etc. I never really thought about travelling to Trieste or Koper mainly because of the costs. I often hear from older people how they used to go to Trieste just for a coffee when they “didn't know what to do”. Nowadays, that is not the case at all, especially for students, due to poor public transport and costs. What I appreciate here in terms of quality of life are natural beauties, tradition, culture – we really have plenty of that and for me those are very important aspects of life in Istria. Personal safety is also at a very high level. I am from central Istria, I live in the countryside, and I have no need to even lock the car at night, for example. As for job opportunities in Slovenia and Italy, I guess there are more of them than here. However, now, I am personally not ready to leave family, friends and social life for that – I like it here and would rather sacrifice the financial side in this case. It would probably

be different if I was born closer to the border, e.g. Buzet or even further north, Savudrija – in that case I would definitely try to find a job in Italy or Slovenia because it would not be such a problem to migrate daily to and from work. (*Vedran*)

I am from Poreč and I travel to Pula to study. In connection to studying, I think we have it all here and it is well organised. However, to better connect and interact with students in Slovenia and Italy, I think it would be a good idea to organise joint lectures with universities in Koper or Trieste. For example, as a day trip to Slovenia or Italy (and vice versa) could be organised which includes attending lectures, hanging out with students there, learning more about the pros and cons of living and studying there, etc. Although I live closer to the border with Slovenia and Italy, I do not travel much there – the main obstacles for that are expensive tolls (there are no regular bus lines to Slovenia and Italy for half-day or one-day trips so we have to go by car), waiting on the borders, etc. (*Magdalena*)

I am also not from Pula, I come from the central part of Croatia. In general, student life here is quite ok for me. For now, I have no need to travel to Slovenia and Italy. I would agree with my colleagues when it comes to tolls. They are definitely too expensive, especially for a student budget. For me personally, since I prefer to be physically active, the negative aspect of the lack of bicycle lanes. I have to use footpaths or roads which are really dangerous. (*Nikolina*)

Overall conclusions: what matter most for a good life in cross-border areas

The results of the pilot study in the Trieste-Koper-Istria area made it possible to draw some general lessons about the quality of life in cross-border areas, which are valuable also for other such areas in Europe. The most important aspects emerged as *five freedoms*, i.e. greater freedom that could be achieved in the transnational context:

- *To satisfy personal life needs and wants*: living near permeable national borders can increase the range of consumption opportunities for the people on both sides of the border, although not in a symmetrical way. When there are significant differences in the average net salaries and local pur-

chasing power of people in the border regions, these have an impact on consumption choices of the people. Different national tax systems can also exacerbate or reduce this impact. The issue was and is still today particularly relevant in the cross-border region of Italy-Slovenia-Croatia: in the past the Italian-Yugoslav border was crossed by Italians to buy petrol, food products (meat) and leisure services (e.g. casinos), while in the other direction people went to Italy to shop for quality goods (e.g. clothes and fashion products). Nowadays crossing the border for such purposes still occurs case especially due to average net salary differences and the high cost of living in Trieste compared to Koper in Slovenia and Pula in Croatia. The reverse applies to housing costs, with apartment rents and purchase prices in Trieste lower than in Koper. This influences the household and business location choices to such an extent that the housing cost factor is not cancelled out by factors constraining cross-border location mobility (e.g., different tax regulations and social integration).

- *To move thanks to integrated cross-border mobility infrastructures and services:* when the administrative controls at the national borders are removed – as happened between Slovenia and Italy, and will happen soon between Slovenia and Croatia when the latter enters the Schengen area – people immediately benefit from reduced time delays to cross the border. However, rail and bus services, and other forms of mobility services (e.g. car sharing) are not adequately integrated across the border, making travelling around without a car less convenient. There is a need for coordinated actions in establishing cross-border public transport services to improve the accessibility of health-care services, education, daily and weekly commuting etc. This should satisfy not only the residents' demands, but also contribute to tourism development and access to numerous attractions within the cross-border area.
- *To enjoy more personal health and fear fewer safety threats:* all EU citizens share the same European Health Insurance Card, so potentially the health systems in these three countries could be better coordinated to provide a wider range of health-care and emergency options for all the people living in the cross-border area, irrespective the country they live. In the case of specialised treatments, integrating the systems could also help to achieve greater efficiency, enlarging the catchment area of potential

users (a case in point is the hospital of Izola, near the border with both Italy and Croatia). Engaging actions of civil society organisations to assist the more vulnerable groups (e.g. care for elderly, women victims of domestic violence) could help to increase the protection of several categories of citizens in the cross-border area.

- *To achieve personal development and flourishing*: a better integration of cross-border value chains in local development sectors – eco-tourism, local food production, creative and cultural activities – and coordinated active labour policies and regulations (e.g. similar labour contracts) in the cross-border area would help from the supply side, eventually providing a wider range of work opportunities, especially for the young. On the demand side, greater economies of scale can be achieved by integrating local markets across the borders, for instance amplifying the demand for cross-border cultural events and festivals, etc. Finally, more personal and self-actualisation opportunities could emerge from integrating formal/informal education and research activities, increasing for instance the number of exchanges and cooperation activities, engaging together the institutions present in the three regions (universities, regional training centres and research institutes) to deliver common projects with a cross-border scope.
- *To enhance identity and civic participation*: a better coexistence of different identities and cultures could be ensured by increasing multi-lingual training programmes and cross-border civil participation activities and dialogues. Language skills are key to enable people to interact and share experiences, values and knowledge. The EU aims to reinforce language training by increasing the share of European citizens speaking three languages – their mother tongue, coupled with an internationally used *lingua franca* (usually English) and a third language. In the cross-border regions the ‘third’ language should be that of the bordering region, so for instance Slovene for Italians and *vice versa* (as a matter of fact more Slovenes speak Italian than the contrary). Multilingualism is in many ways already present in the cross-border area (the minorities in all three countries have kindergartens and schools in their own languages, bilingual signs and tables, etc.). However, it would be desirable also to introduce the learning of the bordering region’s language at all school

levels and for all pupils and to increase multilingual university programmes⁵. The other suggestion which could be realised in the short term is to enhance short-distance exchange school and university programmes between Slovenia, Italy and Croatia.

- *To live in a healthy and flourishing environment*: more sustainable use of environmental resources and services could be better achieved if these are managed as ‘commons’ in the cross-border area. Indeed, climate change and environmental pollution do not respect borders. Another element that should not be severed by borders is the biodiversity and ecological connectivity of natural areas. Moreover, one important environmental common for the Trieste, Koper-Karst and Istria cross-border area is the sea, but marine resources are usually regulated under different and even conflicting national regulations. In addition, the northern Adriatic and the gulf of Trieste is heavily burdened by maritime traffic, which is constantly increasing. There is now a pressing need for a common approach to sea-level rise vulnerability challenges, and a common approach across the three countries should be promoted for the quality of coastal waters, coastal tourism and water mobility services.

5 For instance, as an example the University of Bozen in the Italian border region Trentino Alto Adige delivers tri-lingual programmes: in Italian, English and German.

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