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p. p. 306, SI-1001 Ljubljana, Slovenija
Tel.: +386 (0)1 4706 485; Fax +386 (0)1 4257 802
E-naslov / E-mail: dd-th@zrc-sazu.si
Spletna stran / Website: <https://ojs.zrc-sazu.si/twohomelands>



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MIGRATIONS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT PATHS— A COMPARATIVE PROJECT BETWEEN SWITZERLAND AND SLOVENIA: INTRODUCTION TO THE THEMATIC SECTION

Luigi Lorenzetti¹

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Switzerland and Slovenia are characterized by different historical developments that have shaped their urban and industrial development, social characteristics, and identity dynamics. However, they share some geographical similarities: they all encompass mountainous regions, have a widespread integrated peasant economy, and have experienced significant cross-border migration and mobility events. Influenced by the different historical roles of the border, the migration practices that developed between the 18th and the first half of the 20th century had a significant impact on the specificities of the economic and social development of the border areas of the two countries.

Encouraged by these similarities, from 2020 to 2023, we carried out the project *Migration and development in the mountain borderlands of Switzerland and Slovenia: a comparative perspective (18th–20th century)*. The project aimed to reconstruct and analyze, from a comparative and diachronic perspective, the impact of mobility and migration on four territorial realities of Switzerland (the cantons of Neuchâtel and Ticino) and Slovenia (the regions of Goriška and Styria) between the 18th and mid-20th centuries. More precisely, the project investigated how migration and mobility practices favored the emergence of specific economic models and particular development paths in the selected regions with an emphasis on the 19th century. From this perspective, we considered two alternative hypotheses. The first hypothesis assumes that migrants' remittances are the origin of the formation of "rents" based on conservative investments that serve to defend the existing order in the rural family and its cultural environment. The second hypothesis refers to the transnational interpretation of migration and recognizes that migration has contributed to the formation of open economies and "extroverted" models of social development through the input of labor and the development of skills, know-how, and social relations.

¹ PhD in economic and social history; Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi, Accademia di architettura, Università della Svizzera italiana, Mendrisio; luigi.lorenzetti@usi.ch; ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4957-4553>

Based on these hypotheses, the project considers the interactions between national and local development contexts on the one hand and the population's propensity to migrate on the other, which can increase when the aspiration for better living conditions grows faster than local livelihood opportunities. Migration processes can, therefore, influence the local development context through their impact on labor supply, consumption, investment, inequality, social stratification, local culture, and aspirations. To test these assumptions, the project is divided into three research themes.

- The first theme analyzes migration as a phenomenon that involves flows of goods, financial resources, ideas, and relationships that reflect their characteristics and destinations.
- The second theme looks at the economic and social inequalities created by migration in the regions of origin and arrival.
- The third theme examines how and to what extent borders influence migration income and mobility in the areas under consideration.

The project was carried out by one Swiss and three Slovenian research institutions: the Laboratorio di Storia delle Alpi (www.labisalp.arc.usi.ch), the Institute of Contemporary History (<https://www.inz.si/en>), the Slovenian Migration Institute of the Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (<https://isim.zrc-sazu.si/en#v>), and the Department of History of the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Primorska (<https://fhs.upr.si/en/departments/departments-of-history>). In this thematic block, we present partial results of the extensive research work.

The contributions shed light on the influence of various emigration forms on the logic of migrants' remittances and how these can also take on an entrepreneurial character. At the same time, they emphasize the role of religious institutions in implementing altruistic and redistributive practices by migrants embedded in strategies of family reproduction, as well as the impulses of emigration in the colonial world for the benefit of the economic and cultural development of the regions of emigration.

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