

UDK 911.3:30] (497.5:497.4)

Certain Socio-Geographic Characteristics of a Croatian-Slovenian Border Region (Along the Čabranka-Kupa Valley)

IVAN CRKVENČIĆ

Abstract:

The Croatian-Slovenian border passes through regions with varying natural features, which considerably influence their social and economic development. A part of this border passing through the Čabranka-Kupa Valley (downstream to the town of Brod na Kupi) forms a demographic and economic "oasis" in an otherwise spacious, sparsely populated and economically relatively underdeveloped mountain region. The valley's natural features (deep incision at its base, 500 to 700 m below the surrounding plateau) facilitate only the modest development of polyculture agriculture, even though this is the principal and almost sole branch of the local economy. Since jobs for occupations outside of agriculture have not been created in the valley itself, it is a region marked by constant emigration. This in turn has led to the gradual aging of the population, which is not an auspicious factor for the valley's further social and economic development.

Key Words:

border, border region, natural features, population density, emigration, population age structure

**NEKE SOCIJALNO-GEOGRAFSKE
KARAKTERISTIKE HRVATSKO-SLOVENSKE
PRIGRANIČNOG PODRUČJA
(DOLINOM ČABRANKE-KUPE)**

Izvadak:

Hrvatsko-slovenska granica ide područjima različitih prirodnih obilježja koja su u znatnoj mjeri preduvjet i njihova društvenog i gospodarskog razvoja. Dio te granice koja prolazi dolinom Čabranke-Kupe (nizvodno do Broda na Kupi) predstavlja demografsku i gospodarsku "oazu" u prostranom planinskom,

rijetko naseljenom i gospodarski relativno slabo razvijenom prostoru. Prirodna obilježja doline (duboko usječene u svoju podlogu, 500-700 m ispod okolnog platoa) omogućuju tek slabiji razvoj polikulture poljoprivrede a ona je glavna i gotovo jedina gospodarska grana. Kako u samoj dolini nisu stvorena radna mjesta za zanimanja izvan poljoprivrede, dolina je područje stalnog iseljavanja, što je postupno dovelo do starenja stanovništva koje nije povoljan činitelj daljnjeg društvenog i gospodarskog razvoja doline.

Ključne riječi:

granica, prigranično područje, prirodno obilježja, naseljenost, iseljavanje, dobna struktura stanovništva

The Croatian-Slovenian Border

The overland border of the Republic of Croatia has a total length of 2,208 km, out of which the Croatian-Slovenian border accounts for approximately 546, or 27 percent (BOGNAR, 2001.). The majority of this border was already established at the turn of the twelfth into the thirteenth century. This border can therefore be referred to as one of the oldest European borders, and not just in this part of Europe (BILANDŽIĆ et al, 1991). With time, the administrative and political status of this border changed, as well as its importance. Even so, for the most part it remained stable in the ethno-national sense, and one of the least disputed within the wider European framework (BUFON, 1993-1994). Alterations only occurred in certain places, usually under the influence of wealthy and politically powerful feudal families who occasional held estates on both sides of

the border. After 1527, this border was no longer even divided the Holy Roman Empire and the Hungarian-Croatian state union. From that date until 1918 it only separated political-territorial units within the same state: the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. After 1918, this border within the former Yugoslav federation separated Croatia and Slovenia, two of its republics.

The Croatian-Slovenian border, like all inter-republic boundaries within the former Yugoslav federation, was in fact a state border even before 1991, which became particularly important in the federal constitution of the former Yugoslavia 1974. Nevertheless, to a great extent this border had an integrating character in both social and economic terms, for both countries belonged to the same socio-political and economic system. Life on both sides of the border was regulated by the policies and laws of the respective republics which in many ways complied with federal laws. Thus, in the



Fig. 1 - Croatian-Slovenian border. the subject of this paper is its part west of the road Delnice-Kočevje.

Sl. 1. - Hrvatsko-Slovenska granica. Tema ovog rada je njezin dio zapadno od ceste Delnice-Kočevje.

life of these two peoples in fact had many aspects in common (BELEC, 1992).

Once Croatia and Slovenia became independent states in 1991, this border acquired a new significance. Many aspects of the previous unity were either weakened or discarded, even though a new regulatory regime along the border did not emerge. An agreement on border traffic and cooperation concluded between Croatia and Slovenia in 1997 was supposed to regulate the newly emergent relations along the border of these two neighboring countries. This agreement was finally ratified (by Croatia already in 1997, but only in 2001 by Slovenia), but it has yet to be implemented. Namely, a

series of administrative measures have to be adopted to facilitate its implementation, and this takes time.

Resolving the issues vital to the people on both sides of the border requires a better comprehension of their existing socio-geographic and economic circumstances and the determination of future directions of economic development on this basis. Since individual parts of the Croatian-Slovenian border territory differ from each other in terms of natural features and transit positions, the differences in their socio-geographic structures, as well as the border problems these neighboring countries have to solve, are considerable. One of these sections consisting of specific

natural features, transit position and socio-geographic structures is the Čabranka-Kupa Valley.

Natural Features of the Čabranka-Kupa Valley (to Brod na Kupu)

The valley consists of two branches, one along the Kupa River (which flows from the Kupičko Lake at an elevation of 397 m) and the other along its tributary, the Čabranka River (which has its source at a spring at an elevation of 546 m). Even so, its appearance is that of a unified morphological whole, and this is why it is here called the Čabranka-Kupa Valley. It cuts deeply into its Paleozoic and Mesozoic (primarily Triassic and Jurassic) base (dominated by carbonates and clasts), so that it is 500 to 700 below the surrounding plateaus, above which there are higher mountain ranges. It is approximately 40 km long, out of which the Čabranka accounts for 18 km, while the Kupa accounts for 22 km (up to the town of Brod na Kupu). Most of the valley has a canyon-like appearance, even though it is composite as it consists of wider extensions (5) as well as narrower portions. The valley's slopes are quite steep, particularly in its narrower sections but also in some of the wider sections.

Soils can be found on the valley floor in the direct vicinity of waterways, and they are quite shallow. They were formed by the movement of loose materials from the surrounding slopes, so that together with the waterways they form alluvium. However, the part along the Čabranka

River was carved directly out of the stone base, so that there is almost no alluvium. There is some more alluvium along the Kupa River, but even here it only appears in certain places. The majority of arable land is therefore not on the valley floor both rather on the slopes, particularly in the extended portions. The higher and considerably steeper sides of the valley are dominated by skeletal soils or bare rocky terrain. Soil erosion is significant, so that cultivable surfaces are generally terraced along the slopes, and even these are today largely abandoned.

The valley is in a mountain-basin climatic zone in which snow covers the ground for over 40 days with average precipitation of approximately 2,000 mm annually. The average temperature in this climatic zone in January is -2°C (along the Kupa) to -4°C (along the Čabranka), while in July average temperatures run from $+18^{\circ}\text{C}$ (along the Čabranka) to $+20^{\circ}\text{C}$ (along the Kupa). The entire region is in the beech zone; this is the region's natural vegetation (CRKVENČIĆ, 1998).

Features of the Surrounding Mountainous Region

Cut deeply into its base, partially almost canyon-like, the Čabranka-Kupa Valley is located between two markedly mountainous, isolated, economically underdeveloped and sparsely populated zones: Gorski Kotar on the Croatian side and Dolenjsko and Notranjsko (parts of the former province of Carniola) on the Slovenian side. The features of Gorski Kotar

are particularly important for the Croatian side of the Čabranka-Kupa Valley.

Gorski Kotar is a compact mountain zone of the western section of "highland Croatia," and it is known as "Croatia's mountain threshold" in the academic literature, because it divides the Pannonian and coastal parts of Croatia. The average elevation is 700 to 900 m, but individual mountain ranges and peaks are considerably higher (Risnjak, 1,525 m; Snježnik, 1,505 m; Bjelolasica, 1,534 m). Its relatively complex petrographic composition is dominated by limestone and dolomites, largely from the Jurassic period. It is dominated by forests and meadows; this is the most extensive and highest quality forest zone in Croatia. Arable land is mostly located in several mutually distant fields in karst areas. The Delničko polje (field) is the closest to the Čabranka-Kupa Valley. The region is relatively sparsely populated and economically underdeveloped.

The two aforementioned sparsely-populated and economically underdeveloped mountain regions had an exceptionally isolating character, because the primary transit routes from the continental inland to the Adriatic bypassed them. Central European countries found an outlet to the Gulf of Trieste through lowland central Slovenia (Postojanska Vrata, 609 m), while the Danubian countries (particularly Hungary) and Croatia used the route along the Una River valley (Lička Kaldrma, 670 m) to reach the Adriatic Sea. It was only with the appearance of the Ottoman threat that the route from

the Croatian interior to the Adriatic (Kvarner, Quarnero) moved to the west, i.e. to the Gorski Kotar area. Such traffic (goods transport), however, was carried out mainly with horses (carriages).

The first modern roads through Gorski Kotar were only constructed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These mainly went from Karlovac in various directions toward the Adriatic coast in the Kvarner region. During the eighteenth century, the Caroline (1727), and Josephine (1779) roads were constructed, while during the nineteenth century the Louisiane (1809) and Rudolphine (1874) roads were constructed. But Gorski Kotar only became a transit and contract zone between Pannonian and coastal Croatia after the construction of railroad lines and the upgrade of the Louisiane (Karlovac-Rijeka) road. Only the railroads and the upgraded Louisiane moved the central system of Gorski Kotar to the forefront. This route passed through the so-called Delnice corridor, Gorski Kotar's transit axis. The central transit importance of this corridor has been enhanced by the new Zagreb-Rijeka highway, which is still under construction (CRKVENČIĆ, 1998).

In contrast to the aforementioned integration of Gorski Kotar into Croatia's transit axis along the Zagreb-Karlovac-Rijeka route, the Slovenian mountain region surrounding Dolenjsko and Notranjsko remains isolated in terms of transit. This area is bypassed by all of the major Slovenian thoroughfares that link Ljubljana with Zagreb and the Gulf of Trieste.

These natural, economic and transit features of the surrounding mountain regions have had a great, and negative, impact on the economic and overall social development of the valley itself.

The Čabranka-Kupa Valley in the Surrounding Region's Gravitational and Transit Network

Additionally, the Čabranka-Kupa Valley is neither a unified economic nor transit zone. It is part of the catchment area of its surroundings, both on the Croatian and Slovenian sides.

On the Croatian side, in the Delnice field (and in the Delnice corridor, Gorski Kotar's principal transit axis), the town of Delnice has developed. This is the central settlement even for the Croatian part of the Croatian border zone along the Čabranka and Kupa Rivers. The situation is similar on the Slovenian side, where the town of Kočevje in the Kočevje field is the central settlement for the Slovenian part of the Čabranka-Kupa Valley. Thus the valley is in the catchment area of two settlements located outside of the valley in the peripheral plateaus located 500 m above the base of the valley. Delnice is 12 km away, while Kočevje is almost 30 km away.

Only one longitudinal road of local importance passes through this narrow valley, partially on the Croatian and partially on the Slovenian side. After the establishment of an international border, this became a problem. This is why this road is now being adapted to conform to the

new circumstances. The valley is bisected by two transit routes of regional significance, but only in its extremes peripheries. Both go from Delnice toward Slovenia, one through Čabar (at the valley's northwestern terminal) and the other through Brod na Kupa (at the valley's southeastern terminal).

Population of the Valley and Population Density

The Čabranka-Kupa Valley is a demographic and economic "oasis" in a spacious but mountainous, sparsely settled and economically underdeveloped region. Because of these aforementioned rather harsh natural features, agriculture has very limited possibilities for development, even though it has always been and still is today the valley's primary economic branch. Thus the local population has always looked to the surrounding areas for a means of living (carriage-driving, forestry, mining), or its inhabitants moved to distant places, even abroad. This has had an essential impact on economic development and population development on both sides of the border.

In 1991, the Čabranka-Kupa Valley (up to Brod na Kupa) had 59 settlements, 29 in Croatia and 30 in Slovenia. The total population was 2,414, of which 1,818 lived in Croatian and 593 in Slovenian settlements. A greater number of people live on the Croatian side, which is partially the result of the gentler valley walls on this side which in turn enables larger tracts of

Tab. 1: Population Trends, 1857-1991

Tab. 1: Kretanje broja stanovnika 1857.-1991.

Settlements	1857	1869	1880	1890	1900	1910	1921	1931	1948	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991	2001
Croatia	3667	3547	2917	3137	3098	3259	2828	3109	2847	2842	2677	2314	1972	1818	1515
Indexes		100	82.2	88.1	87.3	91.9	79.7	87.6	80.3	80.1	75.5	65.2	55.6	51.2	41.3
Slovenia	-	1485	1535	1548	1605	1719	-	1681	1343	1366	1138	946	749	593	
Indexes		100	104	104	108	116	-	113	90.4	91.9	76.6	63.7	50.4	39.9	

Sources:

- M. Korenčić. "Naselja i stanovništvo Hrvatske 1857-1971," JAZU, vol. 54, Zagreb, 1979.

- "Popis stanovništva 1991. Narodnosni sastav stanovništva Hrvatske po naseljima," Dokumentacija 881, Zagreb 1992.

- Živko Šifrer. Prebivalstvo naselij 1869-1969. Ljubljana, 1969.

- Popis stanovništva 2001, Statističko izvješće 1137, Zagreb 2001.

arable land, providing a base to feed the local population.

Settlements are small; on average, the Croatian settlements have 60 residents, while the Slovenian settlements have 20. They are scattered all about the valley, often along the waterways or main transit route. Even so, most of them are located along the valley walls, particularly on the Croatian portion of the Čabranka River. In this area, the settlement of Gornji Žagari consists of 13 smaller parts or hamlets, while Okrivje consists of 9 (KORENČIĆ, 1979). These hamlets are separated from each other by forest groves or pastures. They are connected to the trunk road that passes through the valley floor by poorly-maintained paths. Some of these hamlets are 30 km away from the municipal seat in Delnice. The hamlets are variously named according to location or local features (Kamenski Hrib – *stone ridge*, Podstene – *cliffside*; Gusti Laz – *wide pass...*), according to function (Zamost – *bridge*; Brod – *ford*; Požarnica, Požar – *hearth, smithy...*), according to

occupation of the residents (Žagari – *sawyers*), but also according to patronymics, after the most important surname in the settlement (Gašparci, Tometi, Kruljci, Mikuli, Muhvići, etc.). If these hamlets are also counted (and their individual population data has been included in all censuses conducted since the Second World War), then the Croatian side has 49 settlements with an average of 37 residents per settlement.

Since censuses have been conducted, the largest known number of people living in the valley was recorded in 1869, when the census resulted in 5032 inhabitants. After this, the population varied with at an unequal tempo until 1910. The population of Croatian settlements already began to decline by the midnineteenth century, and this continued, with occasional oscillations, until 1931 when the trend became constant. The population of the Slovenian settlements grew until 1910 (there is no data for 1921), only to begin falling after this time, just as was the case for the Croatian settlements – only at a



Fig. 2 - Index of change in the population, 1857-2001.

Sl. 2. - Indeksi kretanja broja stanovnika, 1857-2001.

faster pace. The population of the Slovenian settlements more than halved by 1991, while for the Croatian settlements this occurred in 2001.

What could have caused such a drastic decline in the population? Since the agriculture is by far the most important economic activity in the valley (on both sides), the cause is obviously in the great population density. A very high population density (number of inhabitants per km²) has been established, particularly agrarian population density (number of

total inhabitants per 1 km² of arable land: plough-fields, gardens and orchards). In four cadastral districts (Plešće, Razloge, Turku and Grbajel, in which all settlements are located in the valley), the general population density in 1900 was 34, while the agrarian population density was as high as 576! The only other area in which such a large agrarian population density can be found in this period is several Croatian Adriatic islands. By 1991, this population density altered considerably. By then, the general population

density fell to 11, whiel the agrarian population density fell to 189.

These changes indicate that the extreme pressure exerted by the population on the land, i.e. on agriculture, decreased with time. But the population continued to fall despite this, obviously because employment opportunities in the valley were not created outside the realm of agriculture. Emigration thus continued, and depopulation occurred, which can even be characterized as an exodus from the valley.

Emigration also led to great changes in the spatial distribution of the population that remained in the valley. On the Croatian side of the border, the number of inhabitants declined in all settlements after 1857, except for two settlements with relatively vital central functions (Čabar, the municipal seat, and Brod na Kupi, located at a point where the valley intersects a regional interstate road). The share of the population in these two settlements in the total population of the Croatian part of the vaelly grew from 12.6 percent in 1857 to 42.5 percent in 1991.

Almost one half of the population of the Croatian settlements in the valley lives in only two settlements with a relatively central importance. The population of the remaining, agricultural Croatian settlements in the valley in 1991 was only 32 percent of its number 134 years earlier.

The aforementioned population trends indicate that they were conditioned by the difficult economic circumstances in the valley itself. The valley's inhabitants were always oriented toward finding a means of living, i.e. seeking work, outside of the valley itself. Formerly this used to mean work in surrounding regions (carriage-driving, forestry, mining to some extent), but also in more distant regions. The general economic and social developments in recent years have prompted a considerable portion of the working-age population to seek jobs in the secondary sector in the immediate environs (many in Slovenia), but also in more distant areas.

Data from certain censuses indicate the large portion of the labor force, particularly men, with work outside the valley.

Tab. 2: Ratio of Male to Female Inhabitants

Tab. 2: *Odnos broja muškog i ženskog stanovništva*

Settlements	1880			1890			1900			1991		
	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F	Total	M	F
Croatian	2917	992	1925	3105	1116	1989				1818	889	929
%	100	34	66	100	35.9	64.1					49.0	51.0
Slovenian				1548	508	1040	1588	564	1024			
%				100	32.8	67.2	100	35.5	64.5			

Sources:

Special Orts-Reportorium von Krain, K.K. Statistischen Central-Commission, Vienna, 1984.

Gemeindelexikon von Krain, K.K. Statistischen Centralkommission, Vienna, 1905

Popis stanovništva Jugoslavije 1991. Statistički ljetopis Republike Hrvatske, 1993, Zagreb.

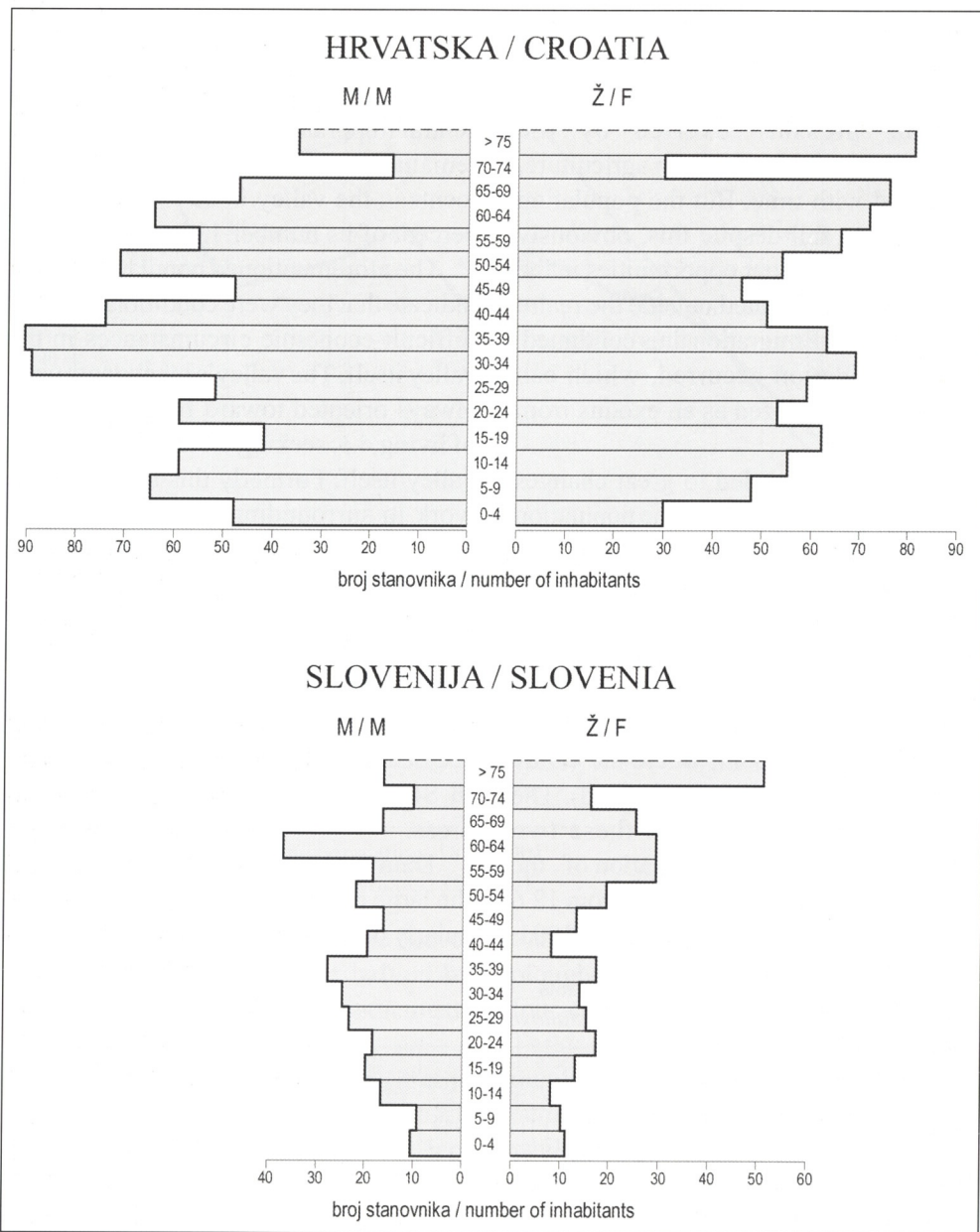


Fig. 3 - Age groups of the population, census 1991.

Sl. 3. - Dobne grupe stanovništva, popis 1991.

From the data shown in the table, it is apparent that a large number of the men were absent when the censuses were conducted in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Therefore, women accounted for 64 to 67 percent of the valley's population that was actually present! It is obvious that a large number of the men were absent during the censuses, i.e. they were working somewhere outside the valley.

The data from Table 2 show that by 1991, the ratio of men to women in the valley had struck a balance, which again indicates that in more recent times both men and women emigrated. Since it is mostly the younger members of the working-age population of both sexes that emigrated, the reproduction of the valley's population fell. The result has been the aging of the population in the valley on both sides of the border. The age of the population in both Croatian and Slovenian settlements in the valley is confirmed by the data from 1991 census.

According to the 1991 census, the share of the young Croatian population (up to 19 years of age) is considerably below a balanced (35%) age structure of a given region, while the share of the elderly population (60 years of age and above) is considerably above (12%) the level of a balanced age structure. The elderly account for as much a one third of the valley's Croatian population. Every third inhabitant is over 60 years of age!

It is apparent that the aforementioned age structure, in which the elderly are

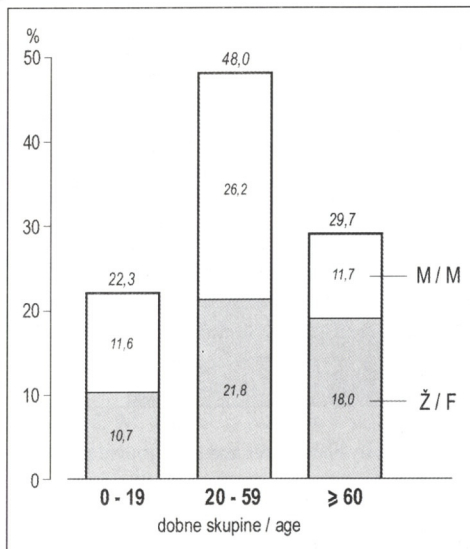


Fig. 4 - Three principal age groups of the population, 1991

Sl. 4. - Tri glavne dobne grupe stanovništva, 1991.

increasingly predominant, is not a good basis for the valley's further economic and general social development. In order to establish the actual and more thorough relationship between the number and share of individual age groups of the Croatian population a survey was conducted in 1995 of 118 households (out of the 666 listed in the 1991 census) in 9 (out of 29) settlements. Some of the results of this survey are shown in Table 3.

It can be seen that the share of elderly persons is greater and the share of working-age persons is less in relation to the data from 1991. This indicates the continuation of the gradual lessening of the role of the population as a factor for further economic and overall growth in the

Tab. 3: Activity Structure of the Population of Interviewed Households (1995)

Tab. 3: *Sastav stanovništva anketiranih domaćinstava prema osnovnim grupama aktivnosti (1995.)*

Population groups	Total		Male		Female	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	355	100	172	100	183	100
Children & school-age population	86	24.2	48	27.9	38	20.8
Active population (15-59)	144	40.6	75	43.6	69	37.7
- in agriculture	17	4.8	9	5.2	8	4.4
- employed	116	32.7	61	35.5	55	30.1
- others *						
Persons over 59 years of age	125	35.2	49	29.1	76	41.5

*

- primarily housewives and some retired persons

- pretežno domaćice i nešto umirovljenika

valley. Also notable is a very small share of the working-age population that works on its own agricultural land, as well as a relatively large share of persons employed in areas other than agriculture. Since there

is an insufficient number of jobs in the valley, a large portion of these employed persons actually work elsewhere. The only encouraging trend is the relatively larger number of pupils in the schools.

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SAŽETAK**NEKE SOCIJALNO-GEOGRAFSKE KARAKTERISTIKE
HRVATSKO-SLOVENSKOG PRIGRANIČNOG PODRUČJA
(DOLINOM ČABRANKE-KUPE)**

IVAN CRKVENČIĆ

Novije političke promjene u Europi, naročito stvaranje i širenje Europske Unije, bitno mijenjaju dosadašnje značenje državnih granica i prigraničnih područja. Mnoge europske granice su postale "mekše" a neke su već i nestale (kao posljedica raspada Čehoslovačke, Jugoslavije). Prigranično područja nekad većinom gospodarski slabo razvijena (periferni položaj u državi) se gospodarski sve jače razvijaju, što jača njihovu integrirajuću ulogu između susjednih država. Istovremeno ranije gospodarske jezgre pojedinih država gospodarski stagniraju pa čak i nazaduju. Navedene promjene izazivaju interes različitih znanosti pa je nastao znatan broj radova koji tu problematiku interpretiraju. Istraživanja

prigraničnih problema započela su i u našoj zemlji, no ona su tek na početku.

O dijelu hrvatsko-slovenske granice određen broj radova objavili su slovenski autori. Potpisani autor se ograničio na istraživanje te granice u području doline Čabranke-Kupe (nizvodno do Broda na Kupi). Objavio je (CRKVENČIĆ, 1998) rezultate istraživanja o dvovlasništvu i o etničkom karakteru granice (multietničnost nije razvijena, ni u začetku). U ovom radu iznosi rezultate svog istraživanja o stanovništvu kao činitelju daljnjeg gospodarskog i društvenog razvoja doline. Utvrdio je starost stanovništva koje nije dobra osnova daljnjeg razvoja. Glavni rezultati iskazani su, osim u tekstu, na priloženim tablicama i slikama.