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LONG-TERM MIGRATION AND REMITTANCES IN THE ALPINE DISTRICT OF GORNJI GRAD: HUMAN AGENCY AMID ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS

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ABSTRACT

Long-Term Migration and Remittances in the Alpine District of Gornji Grad: Human Agency Amid Environmental and Social Constraints

This article examines emigration from the Alpine district of Gornji Grad between the late 19th century and the early 20th century, focusing on the interplay between environmental constraints and human agency. It analyzes how hereditary and marriage customs, timber cutting and rafting, and migration functioned as adaptive responses to environmental limitations and as agents for economic diversification. The study also explores the reciprocal effects of migration through financial and social remittances.

KEYWORDS: alpine communities, Gornji Grad, migration, integrated peasant economy, financial and social remittances

IZVLEČEK

Dolgoročne migracije ter denarni in socialni transferji v alpskem okraju Gornji Grad: Odziv prebivalcev na okoljske in družbene omejitve

Avtorici v prispevku obravnavata izseljevanje iz alpskega okraja Gornji Grad med koncem 19. in začetkom 20. stoletja s poudarkom na prepletu okoljskih omejitev in človekovega delovanja. Analizirata, kako so dedni običaji in poročne navade, sečnja in splavarjenje lesa ter migracije delovali kot prilagoditveni odzivi na okoljske omejitve in hkrati kot element gospodarske diverzifikacije. Predstavita tudi povratne učinke migracij na domačo skupnost preko finančnih, in socialnih transferjev.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: alpske skupnosti, Gornji Grad, migracije, integrirana kmečka ekonomija, denarni in socialni transferji

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INTRODUCTION

The historical study of upland communities as environments shaped by specific natural conditions has long attracted scholarly attention. Because farming staple crops is more difficult at higher altitudes, scholars have traditionally viewed environmental constraints as key to understanding life in mountain communities. In his 1989 book, *Upland Communities: environment, population, and social structure in the Alps since the sixteenth century*, Pier Paolo Viazzo illustrates how, since the 1960s, many scholars have viewed Alpine societies as homeostatic systems, maintaining stability through mechanisms that adjusted the population to the limited natural resources. Hereditary customs, marriage traditions, and other methods of population regulation (such as breastfeeding, contraception, and seasonal work) were often seen as such mechanisms, alongside both seasonal and permanent emigration. Viazzo then demonstrates that neither marriage and inheritance practices nor the causes of migration in the Alpine region conform to a uniform pattern, as they responded both to environmental constraints and to socioeconomic factors (Viazzo, 2014).

More recent research by Aleksander Panjek and his colleagues has offered another compelling perspective on these dynamics. Their concept of the "integrated peasant economy" emphasizes that peasants were not merely passive actors subject to environmental and other constraints but active agents who, through various agrarian and non-agrarian activities, actively sought ways to improve their standard of living whenever possible.

According to Panjek, it was precisely human agency and the desire to overcome natural limitations that drove economic and social change. A limited mountainous environment, therefore, did not merely represent an obstacle but often catalyzed innovative combinations of different income sources (Panjek, 2023).

Yet, where do long-term and permanent migrations fit within these theoretical frameworks? Were they in mountainous areas part of maintaining balance in an environment with limited natural resources, or, as Panjek's concept suggests, were they part of an integrated peasant economy capable of accumulating resources even beyond the home territory? The concept of the integrated peasant economy does not exclude the temporary integration of income for the mere purpose of basic survival. Yet, it emphasizes that peasants of various statuses and wealth also displayed initiative to go beyond the threshold of mere subsistence (Panjek, 2023, p. 89). This raises the question: to what extent were permanent migrations from mountainous regions part of survival strategies, and to what extent were they an expression of active efforts to overcome environmental, social, and other limitations? Clearly, there is no definitive answer to this, as Panjek also notes, "what was originally a matter of choice could later become a necessity" and vice versa (Panjek, 2023, p. 89). The function of any activity of the integrated peasant economy changed over time, depending on broader social conditions.

This paper does not seek a definitive answer regarding the function of long-term and permanent migration from mountainous areas, nor does it attempt a comprehensive chronological analysis of how this function evolved. Instead, through a case study of emigration from the Alpine community of Gornji Grad in the north of present-day Slovenia during the last two decades of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th century, it seeks to shed light on migration as a phenomenon shaped by the interaction between natural conditions and human agency. This will be done by placing emigration in the context of the district's geographical features, hereditary and marriage customs, and timber cutting and rafting activity, which—alongside agriculture—were the most important elements of the integrated peasant (and non-peasant) economy.

In the second part of the paper, we will focus on the reciprocal effects of emigration on the local community. We will explore the economic and social transfers, commonly known as remittances, between the new and old homelands of emigrants from the Gornji Grad district. We will not limit the term remittances to financial transfers but will instead distinguish between financial and social remittances. In this context, we draw on Peggy Levitt's definition, which views social remittances as a "local-level, migration-driven form of cultural diffusion," further explaining that these are "ideas, behaviors, identities, and social capital that flow from receiving to sending-country communities" (Levitt, 1998, p. 926). It is important to note that remittances, of course, flow in both directions.

This article is based on a review of archival materials from the Emigration and Immigration Department at the Archives of the Republic of Slovenia, relevant sources from the Regional Archives Maribor and the Archdiocesan Archives Maribor, emigration press and other publications by emigrants in the United States, printed sources from the interwar period, relevant literature, and interviews with the descendants of nine individuals who emigrated from the district of Gornji Grad during the studied period. Despite the extensive material reviewed, only fragmented data could be collected. Furthermore, the sample of emigration life stories—based on interviews with Prodnik, Kolenc, Mlinar, Remic, Weiss, and Čretnik, and the personal archives of Kolenc, Mlinar, and Čretnik—is too small to allow for definitive and unambiguous conclusions. Nevertheless, the materials provide some insights, raise important questions, and suggest possible interpretations.

THE DISTRICT OF GORNJI GRAD

The former district of Gornji Grad is located in northern Slovenia, with its northwestern section bordering Austria. Historically, this area was part of the Duchy of Styria but also bordered Carinthia (for instance, the village of Solčava gravitated toward Carinthia in the 19th century due to poor transportation connections with the rest of the region under discussion). The district's terrain is predominantly hilly and partly

mountainous. The most mountainous areas are the Savinja Alps, with peaks exceeding 2,000 meters in elevation, which once marked the district's northern and partially western borders. Slightly lower peaks can be found in the Karavanke Mountains to the north. Two rivers, the Savinja and the Dreta, define the district, flowing through its two main valleys, named after the rivers—the (Upper) Savinja Valley and the Dreta Valley (Zadrečka Valley). These valleys were historically significant, enabling timber rafting from late winter to late autumn. Flatlands are found only between the towns of Ljubno and Mozirje, where the Savinja Valley widens somewhat, as well as in parts of the Dreta Valley, in the lower course of the Paka River in the easternmost part of the district. Elsewhere, the valleys are narrow and surrounded by hills and mountains (*Krajevni leksikon*, 1937, p. 162).

In the 1930s, the district had the lowest population density in the entire Drava Banovina, which represented the Slovenian part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (excluding the western part of present-day Slovenia, which was under Italian rule at the time). The average population density in the Banovina was 72.6 inhabitants per square kilometer, while in the Gornji Grad district, it was only 33. This is understandable, given the hilly terrain and extensive forest cover. The district's inhabited areas were primarily in the valley regions along the river basins and in its flatter southeastern part. In the mountainous northwestern part, there were scattered mountain farms, which reached elevations of up to 1,250 meters (*Krajevni leksikon*, 1937, p. 162–163). In terms of household size, the district ranked second in the Banovina. At that time, the average household in the district consisted of 5.27 people, compared to the Banovina's average of 4.87. The average size of landholdings in the district was also comparatively larger than in other parts of Slovenian territory. In 1937, as much as 23% of the landholdings exceeded 20 hectares, a notably high percentage given the general fragmentation of land in Slovenia, where very small holdings predominated. Only the neighboring district of Dravograd, which was also partly mountainous and located near the present-day border with Austria, had a higher percentage of such large holdings. However, it is also important to note the relative scarcity of medium-sized holdings. A significant proportion—52%—of landholdings in the Gornji Grad district were smaller than 5 hectares (calculated based on data from *Statistički godišnjak*, 1938). These smaller holdings were particularly common in the central part of the former district, which is flat.

The district was food-deficient, producing less food than it needed. In 1934, the total cereal production (including corn) per farm worker amounted to 93 kilograms. Only four of the twenty-three districts in the Drava Banovina produced less per farm worker. The district produced 129 kilograms of potatoes per farm worker, which, along with cereals, was the primary source of carbohydrates. This production was also very poor compared to other districts. Only three other districts produced fewer potatoes per farm worker (Calculated based on data from *Krajevni leksikon*, 1937, p. 71–610). According to the estimates of the district doctor of the Ljubljana area, in 1938, the average resident in the Ljubljana surroundings consumed 181 kilograms

of cereals and 180 kilograms of potatoes per year (Pirc, 1938, p. 92). When we compare the above-mentioned estimate with the production data from the Gornji Grad district, it quickly becomes clear that production was well below the nutritional needs (even when considering that the estimate of food consumption was made for the area surrounding the capital, Ljubljana, and may therefore be somewhat higher).

According to the 1931 census, the district ranked fourth in illiteracy among residents aged 10 and over. Of those over 10 years old, 9.2% were illiterate, placing the district fourth among all districts (the average for the Banovina was 5.6%). As was generally the case in the Banovina, the illiteracy rate was higher among women than among men (women 9.7%, men 8.7%) (*Definitivni rezultati*, 1938). This may have been related to the fact that certain parts of the district were very poorly connected to the rest of today's Slovenia. For example, the road to the highest-lying municipality in the district, Solčava, was only built in 1894. Before that, one had to cross the Savinja River 22 times to reach Solčava. From Solčava to Logarska Valley, it was only possible to travel via a narrow path, which was not drivable until 1924. The district remained poorly connected by transport to other parts of the country for a long time. Even in the 1930s, except for a few kilometers of the Celje–Dravograd railway line, the entire district was without a railway (*Krajevni leksikon*, 1937, p. 163—164).

The main source of livelihood for almost 70% of the population in the early 1930s was "agriculture, forestry, or fishing" (the census category), with forestry and livestock farming being of central importance (calculated based on data from *Definitivni rezultati*, 1940). Fields occupied less than a tenth of the district's area, with the proportion of land used for crop farming increasing from west to east, from about 5% to around 20% of the area. Around a quarter of the district was covered by meadows and pastures. Sheep farming and goat breeding were particularly common in the municipalities of Solčava and Luče. In some lowland areas, hops also thrived (*Krajevni leksikon*, 1937, p. 163). The district was heavily forested, with forests covering more than half of its area in the 1930s. Water sawmills along the rivers were used for sawing timber (*Krajevni leksikon*, 1937, p. 163). Apart from the wood industry, where small workshops predominated in the Upper Savinja Valley, no other noteworthy industries existed. During the interwar period, tourism increasingly developed in these areas.

MARRIAGE AND INHERITANCE CUSTOMS

Marriage freedom was introduced relatively late in Styria, which included the Gornji Grad district during the Habsburg period. While considerable marriage freedom—including for servants and daily-paid agricultural workers (*dninarji*)—was established in Carniola as early as the 16th century, marriage permits were still used in Styria in the 18th century. However, even after the final abolition of marriage permits in 1868, regional differences in marriage age persisted. In 1900, the marriage rate

index, which shows the arithmetic mean of the shares of married women in the childbearing period, was higher in all regions (except Carinthia) than in Styria. In Styria, it was 0.398; in Carniola, 0.449; in Istria and Gorizia, more than 0.5; and in Prekmurje, more than 0.6. The index of marital fertility in Styria in 1900 was 0.641; in Carinthia, 0.640; while in Carniola, it was 0.827, suggesting a higher marriage age in Styria and Carinthia. It should be noted that such marriage customs contributed to a higher proportion of illegitimate children. The index of non-marital fertility in 1900 was 0.130 in Styria, 0.219 in Carinthia, and 0.046 in Carniola. However, data on general fertility for the year 1900 show that, despite this, fertility in Styria was relatively low—the general fertility index was lower than in Styria only in Trieste; all other regions showed a higher general fertility index (Šircelj, 2006, pp. 64–74).

A higher marriage age was also observed in some mountainous communities in Carinthia, which exhibited marriage and fertility patterns similar to those in Styria. This suggests that delayed marriage and a higher proportion of permanently unmarried individuals may have been particularly characteristic of or may have persisted longer at high altitudes in the north of today's Slovenia in general. Milivoja Šircelj, for example, demonstrated that the Carinthian municipalities of Strojna and Sele (located at 1000–1060 m and 860–1100 m above sea level, respectively) showed much higher average ages at marriage for both grooms and brides from the mid-19th to the mid-20th century, compared to selected municipalities in other parts of the Slovenian ethnic territory. For instance, grooms married at an average age of 32–35 years and brides at 27–31 years, whereas in Velike Brusnice, a former Carniolan municipality, the average age was 27–28 for grooms and around 25 for brides (Šircelj, 2006, p. 71). This may indicate that such patterns also persisted in the district of Gornji Grad, or at least in its higher-altitude areas.

Regarding inheritance customs, scholars have long maintained a general view that in higher-altitude areas, the principle of indivisible inheritance—where a single heir, usually the eldest son, inherited the estate—prevailed as an adaptation to harsher agricultural conditions. This reduced the marriage rate, as the younger siblings found it more difficult to marry without having the promise of a future inheritance. Data on land ownership structure in the Gornji Grad district between the two world wars suggests that inheritance by a single heir, in general, persisted (at least) in higher altitudes, as the municipality of Solčava, being the highest in the area, had the fewest estates per capita (calculated based on data from *Krajevni leksikon*, 1937, pp. 162–174).

However, the situation in reality was far from uniform. Nataša Henig Miščič, Leonida Brondič, and Aleksander Panjek note that in the mountainous areas of Carinthia, according to the indivisibility principle, large and medium-sized farms, supported by the labor of farm servants, were also perceived to be predominant. Unmarried uncles and aunts (the master's siblings) were believed to have lived on the farm as part of the household. At the same time, however, the authors emphasize that the agrarian structure was by no means static. On poorer land, sometimes

even on communal land, smallholdings (*kajže*) emerged, which were not agriculturally self-sufficient and had to rely on other forms of income. They highlight that, according to Franciscan cadastral data, full farms represented less than 30% in most of Carinthia, and in some areas, smallholdings absolutely predominated. In addition to large farms, there were also many smaller farms whose owners held hereditary rights. Peasants, for example, acquired such rights by clearing lower-quality forest land, thereby gaining property. The right to redeem such land was most often obtained in high-altitude areas. Moreover, peasants also expanded their holdings (by purchasing land) and sold them (Henig Miščič et al., 2023, pp. 153–154).

A similar situation in Gornji Grad district is suggested by Aleksander Videčnik, who cites data from 1937, according to which there were 1,885 farms in the district of Gornji Grad, along with 701 smallholdings and 307 tenants. Videčnik points out that the latter were on the social margins. In an even worse position were the so-called *ofri*, who were obliged to be at the disposal of the master of the cottage in which they lived and had to work to pay their rent. Videčnik also mentions that there was only one master of the farm, while his siblings, as uncles and aunts, became *iberžniki*, that is, a labor force on the farm in exchange for food and shelter. He notes that this landless and unskilled population represented an important labor force for forestry and timber rafting, and in connection with them, he also mentions emigration, especially overseas (Videčnik, 1997, p. 96).

As we can see, the landholding structure in the district of Gornji Grad, much like in Carinthia, became considerably more fragmented than might be inferred solely from the principle of indivisibility. Nevertheless, this principle most likely persisted to a certain extent or maybe even as a general rule even at lower altitudes, as suggested by the family history of the Purnat–Miklavc family (see Figure 1). In this specific case, this practice was abandoned at the end of the interwar period:

Ivan Purnat from Bočna, Frančiška Potočnik from Nova Štifta, Franc Miklavc from Trnovec, and Ana Pečnik from Brdo were all born between 1850 and 1857. Ivan married Frančiška, and Franc married Ana. Ivan and Frančiška Purnat had four children: Frančiška, Marija, Jožefina, and Ivan Jr.; Franc and Ana Miklavc from Trnovec had three: Franc Jr., Jožef, and Jožefa. Jožef fell in love with Ježefina, and his brother Franc Jr. fell in love with Jožefina's sister Marija. Around 1910, Franc Jr. and Jožef Miklavc moved to the United States, and Jožefina and Marija followed them a few years later. Jožef and Jožefina married (most likely in the United States) and remained there until their deaths (Jožef did not inherit). Franc Jr., Marija, and their four-year-old daughter Marija returned to Slovenia around 1921, where, as the eldest son, Franc Jr. took over the farm. Ivan Purnat Jr. married Ivanka Krajnc from Kropa. The two also moved to America (it is unclear whether they married before or in the United States), where their son Johnny (Žani) was born. The family moved back to Slovenia in 1934 when Žani was 12. Ivan inherited the estate and fully renovated it upon returning home. The fourth sister, Frančiška Purnat, married Ivan (Janez) Žmavc and moved to the Žmavc household. They had 12 children, one stillborn and one, Jakec, who died

the same day he was born. Ten children were raised on the family farm: Ivan, Franc, Jože, Anton, Stanko, Rafael, Alojz, Feliks, Peter, and the only daughter, Pepca. Three of them, Pepca, Peter, and Franc, lost their lives during World War II. Jože moved to Ljubno to the Poberin house, Ivan to Vinkovci, while the other men remained in Bočna. Stanko took over the care of the Žmavc farm, Alojz married into the Zgornji Novšek house, Anton into the Orešnik house, Feliks founded a family at the Liks house, and Rafael at the Zakrajšek household (summarized from an interview with Tomaž Čretnik).

In the life story that begins with two couples, born in the mid-19th century, we can trace the inheritance method of passing on property to a single heir (the eldest son) up to the period between the two world wars. The inheritance principle was then interrupted, and the fifth-born son inherited the Žmavc farm.

LOGGING, RAFTING, AND SELLING TIMBER

Felling, hauling, and selling timber were undoubtedly among the most important elements of the integrated peasant (and non-peasant) economy in the former district of Gornji Grad, expanding methods and sources of income for both forest estate owners, merchants, and the lower social strata. Videčnik notes that in the Zadrečka Valley, the common saying between the two world wars was, "If there is no raft, there is no bread." The same author reports great interest in wood-related work among tenants, cottagers, and *iberžniki* (unmarried aunts and uncles living on the farm). This work, however, was arduous and mostly done manually, as many water sawmills were still simple Venetian mills, and the first steam sawmill in Nazarje only began operating at the turn of the 20th century. In the forests, individual trees were felled, or clear-cut areas were created, where the remaining branches and undergrowth were then burned. Workers involved in such clear-cutting were reportedly still claiming, even after World War II, the right to be assigned a plot of land there for sowing cereals, which thrived on such soil. Due to the lack of forest roads, the felled timber was transported down into the valley via earth, wooden, or water chutes, which was a difficult and dangerous task. The workers were organized under the leadership of a group leader (*rižmojster*), who negotiated the price for the contracted work and distributed the payment among the workers. The forest owner sold the timber on the stump to a timber merchant or sawmill owner, and the buyer was responsible for organizing the felling, hauling, and rafting of the timber. According to Videčnik, peasants not skilled in accounting were often deceived in this process. He cites folk stories about how people from the lowlands (Poljanci) defrauded the peasants from Luče, a village in the Upper Savinja Valley. He also notes that the same workers would typically fell the trees, haul them down the chutes to the valley, and then participate in the rafting. For this seasonal work, the group leader usually selected individuals he already knew and trusted (Videčnik, 1997, pp. 96–104).

Wood rafting on the Upper Savinja and Dreta rivers has been documented since the 15th century. Rafts were floated from Ljubno on the Savinja River and Bočna on the Dreta River. Sources from the 17th century indicate that rafts were rare, but by the middle of the 18th century, sources increasingly mention wood rafting. A letter from sawyers and raft masters from the Gornji Grad monastery to Bishop Herberstein in 1779 mentions that the raftsmen supplied all of Croatia and Slavonia up to the Turkish border with wood. It also notes that this trade allowed them to pay all their dues. Similarly, in 1796, the state government of Gornji Grad recorded that substantial sums of money flowed annually into the area through wood rafting on the Dreta and Savinja rivers, continuing to Croatia, Slavonia, and Srem. In the second half of the 19th century, the rafting routes extended all the way to the western Romanian town of Calafat and Černa Voda, near the mouth of the Danube into the Black Sea. As highlighted by Angelos Baš in his work on rafting in Slovenia, these were the longest working voyages for Slovenian peasants, cottagers, and land tenants at the time. Those who traveled to Romania were away for more than six weeks. On their way back, they used a steamboat for part of the journey, then traveled by train and on foot. Even those who only traveled to the areas between Slavonski Brod and Belgrade were absent from home for about two to three weeks (Baš, 2003, pp. 9–14).

Wood rafting was quite a profitable activity. In the early 20th century, 2,000 to 3,000 rafts traveled along the Savinja and Dreta rivers annually, with even more in the 1930s, when estimates and data for specific years show around 4,000 rafts per year. In the 1930s, a wood rafting master, who typically conducted four to five trips per year, could earn a net profit of around 33,600 to 52,500 dinars. Although the wood rafting master led the rafting operation, even less wealthy individuals could participate in wood rafting, thus supplementing their income. During the same period, the net earnings of a raftman (after subtracting the cost of a train ticket for the return journey) who was not a wood rafting master were about 90–100 dinars per trip to Celje. Raftmen traveling to Rugvica earned around 2,000–4,000 dinars annually, while those heading to locations between Slavonski Brod and Belgrade earned around 6,000–10,000 dinars per year (depending on the year, as earnings increased toward the end of the 1930s). Wood rafting masters covered the cost of food for these raftmen on longer trips and provided them with a train ticket for the return journey, making their actual earnings even higher (Baš, 2003, pp. 25–26). For comparison—according to the calculations of France Kresal, the average monthly wage in the mid-1930s was around 600 dinars, while the salary of civil servants was about 2,500 dinars per month (Kresal, 1995, p. 36). The average monthly wage of a servant in the Banovina, according to calculations by Filip Uratnik, was around 170 dinars. The *dninar* (hired agricultural laborer, paid daily) typically received food and around 13 dinars a day for their work (Uratnik, 1938, pp. 77–80). The earnings from wood rafting were, therefore, very good.

Franjo Baš, in his 1938 study named *Življenjski nivo kmeta* (The Standard of Living of Peasants), classified peasants, who were still the dominant category of the

population in Slovenia at the time, into two groups: the patriarchal type, living in remote areas with a lifestyle that was both materially and mentally below the level of the average Central European peasant, and the so-called bourgeois type of peasant, who, although engaged in agriculture, lived, dressed, housed, and thought in a bourgeois manner.

> In diet, clothing, housing, and intellectual life, the bourgeois type of peasant lives in a bourgeois manner. Generally, coffee and beef are consumed, not only occasionally on Sundays but also during the week. Clothing is bourgeois, with a conservative cut, but still bourgeois. The dwelling is furnished with goods made by craftsmen and offers adequate supplies, including sufficient hygiene with water. Intellectual life is guided either by newspapers or by educational and economic organizations that mentally guide peasants. […] The patriarchal type of peasant maintains continuity with the pre-feudal peasant in all aspects of his intellectual life, in food, clothing, and housing. He reads in the winter but not regularly as the bourgeois peasant does. The individual outlook on life is minimal […], and he follows the examples set by his models, the church, or the landlord from whom he depends. Coffee has not yet become a regular breakfast in his diet, and breakfast consists of corn or potato soup. […] The dwelling of the bourgeois peasant offers an average of one bed for each family member, while the patriarchal peasant's dwelling can accommodate two people in one bed. Similarly, housing spaces are fewer. While we can claim that the bourgeois peasant has separate living quarters for the master and mistress, as well as separate spaces for the male and female children once they grow up, the patriarchal peasant, especially in the case of the winegrower or woodcutter, has, in addition to the shared house, only two or even one room, so that, especially in the winter, when men sleep in the hay, the whole family sleeps in two or just one room. Overall, in contrast to the bourgeois peasant, the patriarchal peasant is insufficiently nourished and passive in his intellectual life (Baš, 1938, p. 121).

Baš linked his typology of peasants to the size of the farm, which either enabled or hindered modernization (above or below 5 hectares). In terms of location, Baš placed the bourgeois type of peasant in the vicinity of larger cities (particularly Ljubljana, Celje, and Maribor), in areas where industrial crops were grown (such as hops in the Savinja Valley), and in places where long-distance trade was developed (such as wood rafting in the Drava Valley or Upper Savinja Valley in Gornji Grad district).

As we can see, tree felling, timber hauling, and wood rafting represented a financially significant activity for various social strata—both for large forest owners and merchants, as well as for the peasant population, for whom wood-related work was an important element of the integrated peasant economy. The peasants described by Baš in the above passage are very likely the ones who managed to climb the social ladder precisely because of the timber trade. Wood rafting simultaneously gave the population a window to the outside world and normalized long absences from home.

In the Gornji Grad area, it ended during World War II, and it was not revived afterward. A cooperative wood rafting initiative was also unsuccessful (Baš, 2003, p. 16).

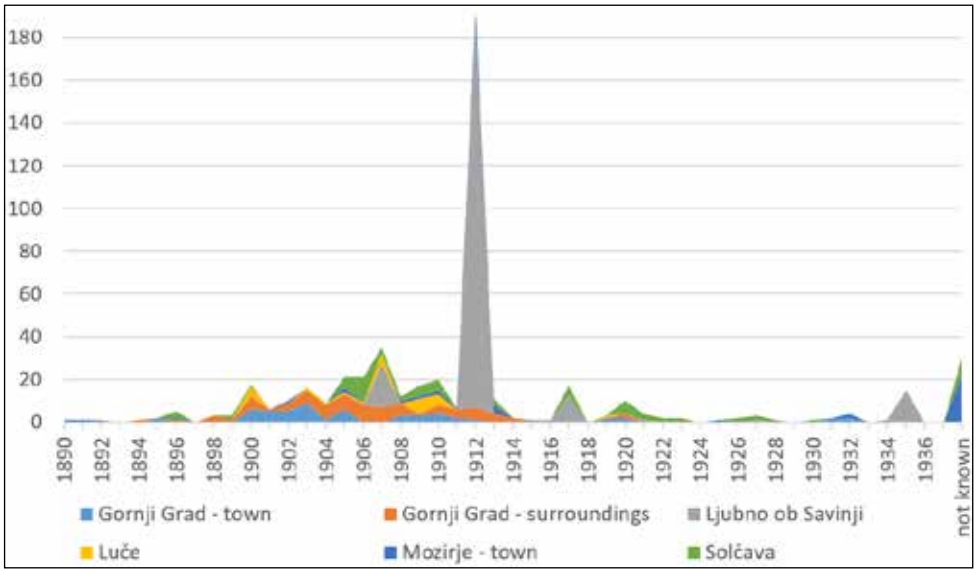
EMIGRATION

As Aleksej Kalc writes in the comprehensive collective work on migration in Slovenia, *Doba velikih migracij na Slovenskem* (Daring Dreams of the Future: Slovenian Mass Migrations 1870–1945), migration movements were most intense in areas where local agrarian resources were limited, such as in mountainous regions (Kalc et al., 2020). Based on the percentage of emigrants relative to the total population (calculated by the population data for 1931), the Gornji Grad district ranked ninth (out of 23) among the districts in the Banovina from 1880 to 1931. During this time, 9.5% of the population, based on the 1931 census, emigrated (Sedlaček, 2015, p. 59).

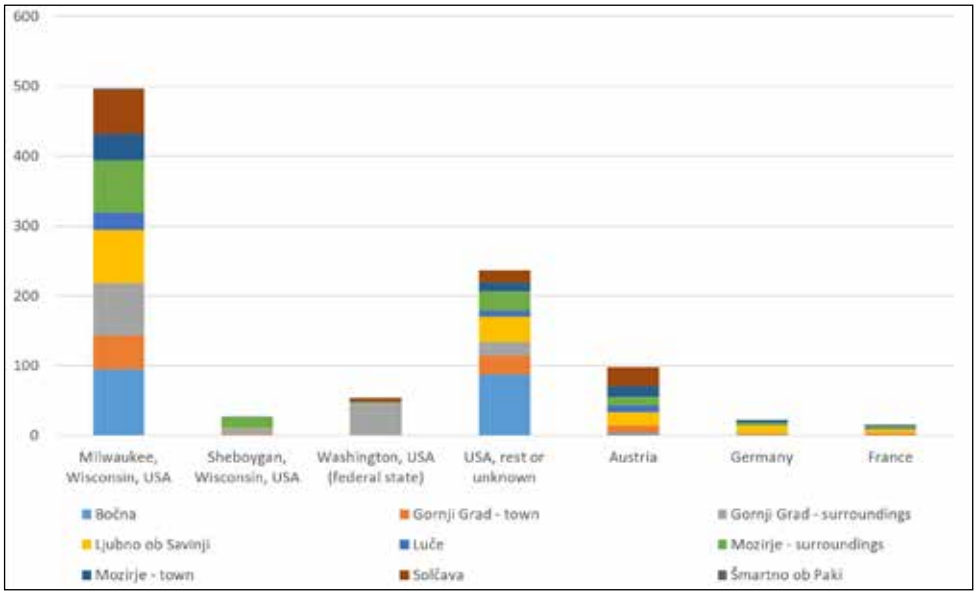
In 1931, all the municipalities in the Drava Banovina prepared lists of all known people who had emigrated from their territories between 1880 and 1931. The statistics included the emigrant's name and surname, date and year of birth, the exact address of their destination, year of emigration, occupation, whether the person was married, how many children they had, and whether they were in contact with their family through letters. There was also a space for other notes, which sometimes included information about whether the person had died abroad, and for women, the maiden surname was occasionally recorded. The quality and reliability of the statistics for individual municipalities vary, with some being more useful than others. However, they generally suffer from numerous shortcomings, including the fact that they were compiled retrospectively based on the recollections of local residents about their relatives and fellow villagers. Moreover, our field research showed that most of the ancestors of the people we interviewed were not listed in these statistics. Some sections were often left blank, and the census for the municipality of Rečica ob Savinji is entirely missing. Nevertheless, the statistical data at least provide a general insight into the trends of emigration and the destinations of emigrants from the Gornji Grad district.

Graph 1 shows the emigration trends from the Gornji Grad district. Different colors or shades represent the various municipalities of the district, as shown in the legend. It should be clarified that the municipalities of Bočna, Mozirje – surroundings, and Šmartno ob Paki are not included in the legend, as the year of emigration was not recorded at all for the first two municipalities, and the data for the municipality of Šmartno ob Paki are statistically insignificant since only two emigrants were recorded. It should also be explained that the peak in 1912 is not accurate because, in the municipality of Ljubno ob Savinji, the year of emigration was approximately assigned to the listed individuals in terms of "emigrated twenty years ago," so the peak in the graph should actually be spread across other nearby years. Despite all these reservations and shortcomings, the graphical representation still clearly shows the first decade and a half of the 20th century as the peak of emigration, which

then significantly slowed down after the start of World War I. This dynamic aligns with emigration trends reflected in Mulaček's statistics for Carniola, which derived from official records (although also containing certain deficiencies) (Mulaček, 1913; Drnovšek, 1999).



Graph 1: Emigration from the Gornji Grad district by year and individual municipalities (AS 74, n.d.).



Graph 2: Emigration from the Gornji Grad district by destination and individual municipalities (AS 74, n.d.).

Graph 2 shows the most common emigration destinations, with the United States strongly leading, especially Milwaukee and Sheboygan in Wisconsin. From conversations with interviewees, the town of Little Falls in the state of New York also emerged as a frequent destination. Slovenians in Wisconsin were employed in various occupations, from farmers and livestock breeders to industrial workers.

Milwaukee, located on Lake Michigan, was Wisconsin's largest city at the time, with over 450,000 inhabitants. It was a major commercial center with a strong leather industry (in the late 1920s, it ranked second in the United States in leather production), as well as breweries and machinery, textile, footwear, and woodworking industries. The city also had steel mills, foundries, slaughterhouses, and tobacco factories. By the end of the 1920s, there were about 7,000 Slovenians in the city and 9,000 in the surrounding area. They worked in banks, stores, factories, and slaughterhouses. Many were craftsmen and merchants, but the largest group worked in the leather industry (Zavertnik, 1925, p. 528).

Figure 1: The Purnat Family in the United States, likely in the early 1930s (personal archive of Breda Kolenc).

Sheboygan was also located on Lake Michigan. By the end of the 1920s, it had over 31,000 inhabitants. The city had furniture factories, toy factories, machine shops, textile and shoemaking businesses, tanneries, and enamelware production facilities.

The surrounding farmers engaged in livestock farming and dairy production. There were fewer Slovenians here, around 2,600. The vast majority worked in factories. In addition, Slovenians in the city were wholesalers, butchers, tailors, and shoemakers. They also owned a stonemasonry workshop, a photography studio, and a painting studio. Some were involved in restoration work (Zavertnik, 1925, p. 533).

From this, we can infer that the emigrants' migration was both spatial and sectoral. Based on the interviewees' testimonies, it was clear that they had materially advanced in the United States. This is supported by statements such as "He must have earned quite well up there," "Oh, when he returned, he was quite a gentleman," "They must have done well," and so on. This is also evident in photographic material preserved by one of the interviewees, which shows that the equipment of relatives in the United States was considerably more modern than what was available at home at the same time.

MACRO PERSPECTIVE

To better evaluate what we have presented so far, we must take a step back and view the events from a macro perspective. During the period under consideration, broader processes of modernization, industrialization, urbanization, and restructuring in agriculture were unfolding across Europe and, with a delay, also in the Slovenian territory. A demographic transition accompanied these processes.

Žarko Lazarević (2017; 2018) places migrations at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century in the context of industrialization, urbanization, and rural overpopulation. He points out that the Slovenian territory before World War II was characterized by faster population growth than economic growth, which made rural overpopulation the leading driver of emigration. Emigration increased leading up to World War I. As Slovenia was lagging in modernization processes, industrialization only began to take shape in the 1880s when basic energy, transport, and financial infrastructures were established. Despite this, the number of new jobs was insufficient, which led to migration as a response to rural overpopulation in the last decades of the 19th century. These migrations had both spatial and sectoral relocation characteristics (from agriculture to non-agricultural sectors). Lazarević shows a correlation between rural overpopulation and emigration rates in four different regions, confirming the link between the two. He divides the background of migration into three periods. The first period, pre–World War I, was characterized by a traditional economy, a high agricultural overpopulation, and increasing emigration. In this period, emigration did not solve the problem of rural overpopulation but alleviated it to the extent that a slow restructuring in agriculture could begin. The second period spans the interwar period, a time of economic transition when agricultural overpopulation was lower. In the third period, post–World War II, accelerated industrialization made internal migration from the countryside to the cities significant.

Between the two world wars, rural overpopulation began to decrease, as did migration. However, until the beginning of World War II, the population grew faster than the economy. Rural overpopulation continued to limit the population's prospects and economic and social opportunities (Lazarević, 2018, p. 21–29; Lazarević, 2017). However, as Lazarević also points out, although an important background and cause of emigration, economic reasons are insufficient to explain migration comprehensively. Often, migration was a family or personal strategy to improve one's life.

MIGRATION AT THE CROSSROADS OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CONSTRAINTS AND HUMAN AGENCY

As we have seen, the natural characteristics of the district—much of which lies at higher elevations and more than half of which was forested—contributed to nutritional insufficiency while simultaneously providing abundant timber resources and waterways suitable for log rafting. Timber harvesting and rafting served as important sources of income across all social strata and constituted a key component of an integrated peasant (and non-peasant) economy. Migration offered yet another means of overcoming this mountainous district's natural limitations, as well as an opportunity for higher earnings and potential upward social mobility. In this context, migration to the United States was particularly prominent. Data from our interviews suggest that marriage and inheritance customs may also have been significant push factors of permanent and long-term migration. As we have shown, despite land fragmentation, the indivisible inheritance principle appears to have continued to play a role in the Gornji Grad district even during the interwar period. Furthermore, available data indicate that the proportion of unmarried individuals of reproductive age in the district was higher than the Slovenian average and that those who did marry tended to do so at a later age.

When we asked our interviewees about the reasons for their ancestors' emigration, two main themes recurred: economic aspirations and love—often intertwined in stories of couples seeking to build a life together abroad. In many such cases, the man emigrated first, followed later by his partner; the couple would then marry once reunited overseas. Another interesting example that illustrates how marriage and inheritance customs acted as a push factor for migration is the story of Ančka from the village of Otok. According to the informant Manca Remic, Ančka left for the United States in 1923 at 19 and married a fellow countryman, Ciril from Rečica ob Savinji, with whom she was reportedly in love even before leaving for the United States. The informant, however, pointed out her status as an illegitimate daughter as a circumstance that might have been crucial in her decision to emigrate to the United States: "Why did she go to America? I don't know exactly why. She was an illegitimate child, which at the time was quite a stigma. But she was already in love with Ciril, who later became her husband" (Remic, 2022).

Sometimes, migration was part of a family strategy or simply an individual decision. What they could expect from emigrating to America is testified by the words of informant Peter Weiss (2022): "My great-grandmother was in America. She was a tavern keeper and had four sons. By 1935, one of the sons was already a dentist. In just one generation, they advanced that much. This was something that you couldn't even imagine here, such a rapid leap on the social ladder." The decision to migrate was often connected not only to the prospects of a better future but also to poverty and the lack of opportunities for a good life in the homeland, as evident from the story that Jožef Mlinar from Bočna shared with us about his ancestors: "Before World War I, my grandfather emigrated to the US due to poverty. He sold the farm, and his wife, my grandmother, returned to her parents. Their son, my father, came to Bočna as a farmhand. When he earned enough money, he emigrated to the US in 1912, and after 20 years, in 1932, he returned to Bočna, to the farm that his aunt had left him" (Mlinar, 2022). Migrations often had a profound impact on family structure, dividing families. This is also evident in the story that Bernarda Prodnik told us. Furthermore, this story suggests that the reason for immigration may have been the illegitimate children, who could have brought stigma, hardship, and likely also the parents' desire to provide them with a better life:

> My grandfather emigrated to Canada in 1926. My grandmother was then 26 years old and already had four children, one born out of wedlock. The three others were born close together. The children were very young; my mother was born in 1922, her sister in 1924, and her brother in 1926. The first out-of-wedlock daughter was just a little older than these children. He also had an out-of-wedlock son. […] My grandmother found it very difficult at home. She resented him very much for leaving, although he sent money. (Prodnik, 2024)

However, we must emphasize that, based on the collected stories, we can only infer (and that too very limitedly) the role of migration between the two world wars. We cannot conclude much about its role in earlier periods when emigration was at its peak.

REMITTANCES

In this part of the article, we will present remittances from the emigration country to the home community, as we were able to document through interviews. Some of these remittances refer to post–World War II, and some relate to the period between the two world wars, which we will always indicate accordingly. We have categorized remittances into two types—financial and social remittances.

Financial remittances

From all the interviews we conducted, it was clear that emigrants abroad (mostly to the United States) significantly improved their financial situation, lived better, etc. We were also able to document several examples where these financial resources, in one way or another, in the time between the world wars, returned to the home district. The words of Breda Kolenc from Bočna testify, for example, to how the money earned in the United States came back to the old homeland and was used to renovate the family estate: "When my grandfather returned from America, the estate was abandoned. Then he renovated everything" (Kolenc, 2022). In the case of Bernarda Prodnik's grandfather, financial remittances regularly flowed into the home village. They were neither received as a lump sum upon the emigrant's return home nor was the financial assistance limited to the immediate family: "Grandfather always sent money home. Then, one day, because he had sent her the wrong letter, Grandmother realized that he was also sending money to others in the village. She was furious. She never forgave him" (Prodnik, 2024).

Especially interesting is Ana Vodušek's will from 1927 (personal archive of Jožef Mlinar), in which she bequeathed her estate with a house in the village of Bočna to her nephew Jožef Mlinar five years before her death. Jožef Mlinar had been a servant on the Žmavc estate in Bočna since he was ten years old. When he was 20, he decided to go to the United States to earn money and secure a better life. He went to Little Falls, New York. His love followed him, and they later married there. In 1932, he returned with his family to Bočna after learning that his late aunt had left him the estate. At that time, as a worker, he had greatly improved his financial situation; in the United States, he owned a house and a car (interview with Jožef Mlinar). Therefore, his aunt's will can be seen as a form of remittance, as it reflects the financial impact of emigration on the home community. According to the terms of the will, Jožef Mlinar had to make several payments, which he did with money earned in the United States. In the will, he was tasked with paying:

- Funeral expenses (clothing for the deceased, coffin, grave digging, ringing the bells, mass, and payment to the priest) totaling 5,791 dinars. Additionally, he had to pay for the wake—food, drink, and three waitresses totaling 5,000 dinars.
- 12,500 dinars to the church in Bočna.
- 12,500 dinars for masses and Way of the Cross.
- 7,500 dinars for the poor of the third order of the parish in Bočna.
- 1,250 dinars for the parish poor in Bočna.
- 1,250 dinars for poor schoolchildren.
- 2,500 dinars for the volunteer fire department in Bočna.
- 10,000 dinars for his underage children, Zofija (born 1917) and Jožef (born 1918), who lived with him in the United States.

- 10,000 dinars for his brother Anton, who also lived in Little Falls.
- 10,000 dinars for Anton Mlinar's children, Anton (born 1911) and Albin (born 1915), who lived with their father in the United States.
  (Ana Vodušek's will, personal archive of Jožef Mlinar)

He had to make payments to 14 other people not related to him (including nine children from two different families). The total payments exceeded half of the estimated value of the inherited estate and reflected social responsibility (church, firefighters), charity (the poor and poor schoolchildren), and a sense of social justice (the heir had to pay 21 people in total, seven relatives and 14 people who were not related to him). From this will, we get a sense of how important financial remittances could have been for the entire community.

Social remittances

From the interviews, we also gathered evidence of some social remittances, which we divided into welfare/poverty criteria and social standard remittances, lifestyle remittances, material culture, clothing culture, and traces in local sayings and language. All of these remittances, except the first story and traces in local sayings and language, refer to the post–World War II period.

Welfare/poverty criteria, social standard

In 1934, after about 20 years of living in the United States, Ivan Purnat Jr. and Ivanka Krajnc returned to the village of Bočna with their 12-year-old son, Žani. The words of Ivan and Ivanka's granddaughter, Breda Kolenc, about the time when her grandfather Ivan Purnat Jr. and his family returned home testify to how life in the United States influenced the perceptions of what constitutes luxury, basic standards, and poverty: "When his father died, they told him that the estate would be abandoned if he didn't come back. So, he returned with his family. But his wife Ivanka didn't like it. She said, if I had known I would be coming back to this (and it was after the war), I would have stayed in America" (Kolenc, 2022). Breda Kolenc also spoke about the embarrassment her grandmother Ivanka felt when she received a visit from her sister Kristina, who had been living in America, in the 1950s: "Grandmother said she was a bit embarrassed when her sister Kristina came to visit around 1950—she said, 'Oh, let's fix up the façade so she doesn't think we're so poor here'" (Kolenc, 2022). Although Breda's grandmother Ivanka was aware of the differences in lifestyle between Bočna and the United States, the family still had a higher standard of living than the other villagers upon their return from America, as they had completely renovated the farm. In addition: "At our house, we had the first outdoor flushable toilet" (Kolenc, 2022).

Lifestyle

Breda Kolenc also recalled the different lifestyle of her family compared to that of the neighbors in the village: "We often had celebrations. Something was always happening. It seemed a bit American to me. I can't remember celebrations like that anywhere else here. For all holidays, for March 8, for Mother's Day, we had things happening at our house … family, neighbors. Mom and Dad were very social. The neighbors were maybe a bit more reserved, but when they were invited, they all came" (Kolenc, 2022).

Material culture

Many emigrants sent packages home containing goods that the interviewees remembered as something special and luxurious. Manca Remic recalls that Aunt Ančka (whose mother, despite not being related to them, her parents took care of) sent things that seemed special to her: "She would send us gifts; I remember an elephant, a necklace, a watch, and a doll named Ančka—it all smelled so nice" (Remic, 2022). Breda Kolenc also recalls the treats and special items that relatives who remained in the United States sent to the family: "They used to send us such amazing packages. Rice chocolate was always in the package. […] I remember they sent us popcorn. Then Dad Žani would pop it and season it with butter. […] I loved dolls. They sent me such a nice doll, with a suitcase of clothes to dress her in" (Kolenc, 2022).

Especially remarkable is the story of the first radio in the village of Kraše, which, according to Peter Weiss's account, was in his grandfather's house. Since it came from the United States, it had to be slightly modified: "In Kraše, the first radio came from America, and they had to take it to the blacksmith to add a bulb, and it had to always be on because in America the voltage was 110V, while here it was 220V. They had to lower the voltage a bit."

Clothing culture

Among the special status symbols were clothes from America: "They sent us beautiful American clothes. I know I was confirmed in an American dress—a short, silk dress. We even gave these beautiful clothes to the neighbor's children. My mom was always wearing American clothes" (Kolenc, 2022).

Traces in local sayings and language

Linguist Peter Weiss described the appearance of the calling form of the Slovenian name Marija as "me:ra" and "m(i]:ri" (i.e., Mary) in the village of Kraše—forms that originate from English and appear only in a reference to a resident of Kraše who was

born in California. The nickname *(A)merkanc*, "(a)mer'kB:nc" (an American), was used for those who had returned from the United States (Weiss, 1993, p. 79). Similarly, the first sawmills, which supposedly didn't arrive in the Gornji Grad forests before 1911, were called *amerikanke* ("Americans") because they were said to have been brought to the area by emigrants to Canada. (Videčnik, 1997, p. 106) Weiss, who was also one of our interviewees with a family experience of emigration, told us in the interview that "for the city of Milwaukee, which was a common destination for emigrants from the Gornji Grad area, the Slovenianized pronunciation of 'Milˈvaːukɛ' became established in the local dialect" (Weiss, 2022). The last example of these kind of remittances is particularly noteworthy. It concerns a saying that became established in the speech of Kraše after a story that has also been preserved in local tradition: "There was one family, the Grehčevi from Spodnje Kraše, who went to America twice, but then they returned. They acted a bit lofty. Once, when the mother was hoeing the field, she called her son to check the *potica* (pie) in the stove. In the middle of the week, when a *potica* is usually not baked, the son replied truthfully—'I can't check the pie, mom, because it's not there'" (Weiss, 2022). And that's how the saying among the people became 'as good as Grehčev pie'—ironically speaking. The expression for 'pie' became established in the dialect as 'pa:j'" (Weiss, 1993, p. 79).

As we have seen, financial remittances sometimes provided essential support to families. They contributed to the local economy, while social remittances influenced norms, values, and lifestyles, manifested in the material culture and clothing, bringing new ideas and practices and even leaving traces in language. These remittances reveal the emigrants' enduring connection to their homeland and the multifaceted financial, socioeconomic, and cultural impacts migration had on the home community. In that way, migration both responded to and influenced local circumstances.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored how the inhabitants of the Alpine district of Gornji Grad actively responded to environmental constraints through a range of interconnected practices. Rather than being static or solely dictated by necessity, these practices were dynamic, adaptive strategies that reflected both the challenges of a mountainous environment and the creative agency of rural populations. Marriage and inheritance customs, while seemingly straightforward, reveal a complex interaction between adaptation to limited agricultural resources and social aspirations. These customs functioned as a kind of push–pull mechanism. While helping maintain viable holdings (at least for a specific time in history), they also generated pressures that spurred individuals to seek alternative livelihoods, including through seasonal work or migration. This tension gave rise to varied forms of economic and personal creativity—how to secure enough income on a smallholding, marry despite limited prospects, or integrate external opportunities into local life. Timber, as one of the

most important pillars of the integrated peasant economy in this area, provided a critical alternative source of income. Timber rafting and migration often functioned as complementary, though not simultaneous, strategies: one could not engage in both at once, yet involvement in timber work perhaps led individuals to consider migration as a next step. In this context, migration was both an alternative mechanism for income integration and a means of transcending local limitations. For some, it was a temporary strategy undertaken with the intention of returning home with accumulated resources; for others, it was a search for a new life, expanding income and opportunity beyond the boundaries of the local environment. Moreover, as the data we have presented suggest, migration was most likely linked to marriage and inheritance patterns, as individuals constrained by these customs sometimes sought new possibilities abroad. Emigration also had reciprocal effects on the home community through remittances—not only financial but also social. These transfers influenced social norms and even left traces in the local language.

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The research data is stored at the Institute of Contemporary History.

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POVZETEK

DOLGOROČNE MIGRACIJE TER DENARNI IN SOCIALNI TRANSFERJI V ALPSKEM OKRAJU GORNJI GRAD: ODZIV PREBIVALCEV NA OKOLJSKE IN DRUŽBENE OMEJITVE

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Avtorici v prispevku obravnavata dolgoročno izseljevanje iz alpskega okraja Gornji Grad med koncem 19. in začetkom 20. stoletja ter si zastavljata vprašanje, na kakšen način so na izseljevanje vplivale okoljske omejitve in družbene norme, zlasti zakonski in dedni običaji. Na podlagi koncepta integrirane kmečke ekonomije pokažeta na trud lokalnega prebivalstva, da bi s svojim usmerjenim delovanjem preseglo omejene naravne vire z integriranjem raznolikih virov dohodka, kot so delo v lesni dejavnosti, sezonsko delo in stalna selitev. Migracije so opredeljene kot strategija odziva na demografske in ekološke pritiske, pa tudi kot izraz usmerjenega delovanja z namenom izboljšanja socialno-ekonomskih razmer onkraj golega preživetja. Na podlagi študije primera, temelječe na arhivskem raziskovanju in intervjujih s potomci izseljencev, avtorici ponujata vpogled v kompleksen odnos med lokalnimi razmerami in globalno mobilnostjo. Pri tem posebno pozornost namenjata povratnim učinkom izseljevanja na domačo skupnost, s poudarkom na finančnih, socialnih in kulturnih transferjih. Slednji niso pomenili zgolj materialne podpore, temveč so tudi prispevali k socialnim spremembam ter vplivali na kmečka gospodarstva in njihove vsakdanje prakse, na vrednote in celo na lokalne narečne posebnosti, s čimer so preoblikovali tudi kulturno podobo okraja.

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