

Summary

Spodnje Podravje (The Lower Drava Valley) is one of several Slovenian regions distinguished by a large comparative advantage in applying the sustainable paradigm to further development, and transferring it effectively into a development strategy and practice. A high degree of regional identity has been cultivated here in the course of past development.

One of the most important starting points for the sustainable development of regions is the **coordinated and balanced functioning of all subsystems** (production, residence, supply, transport, and social, health, and educational systems). Through mutual complementarity, an environment providing a high quality of life can be created, and a space in which activities do not come into conflict with one another. In order to achieve this, it is essential to realize that all components are directly or indirectly interconnected in a complex system. **An integrated approach in planning** ensures that solving one problem in a specific area does not become the source of a new one, and also makes possible the creation of the harmonious and even development of a unified system composed of urban settlements, rural areas, and their “partnership”.

The Lower Drava Valley does not diverge in any significant way from the average for Slovenian rural areas with respect to demographic characteristics and **demographic development**. It has **slight growth in population**, and the index of aging is within the average for the whole of Slovenia. The process of **suburbanization** is continuing, and is expanding spatially to the environs of Ptuj and Ormož. In the region of Haloze and Slovenske Gorice the decline in population has been halted, and there has been a concentration of population in the larger central settlements, especially municipal centers.

From the standpoint of **regional development** the area has averagely favorable demographic potential: the only problem for development is represented by the relatively low proportion of the population with higher education. Small and less accessible settlements in the Haloze and Slovenske Gorice regions are demographically threatened. In these areas it is necessary to ensure suitable living conditions which would prevent the further emigration of the population: improvement of road connections and infrastructure, mobile systems of supply, possibilities for the renovation and expansion of settlements.

The Lower Drava Valley is characterized by **moderate growth in areas of settlement**. This is greatest in settlements in the broader zone of suburbanization around Ptuj and Ormož. In recent times the majority of new settlement areas in the Drava Plain have been in the form of compact building in or on the edge of existing settlements. New municipal planning documents also require that areas for expansion of settlement be in the form of **compact settlement**. In the dispersed settlements of the Haloze and Slovenske Gorice regions there has been new construction in some places which is more sprawling in form, and it will therefore be necessary to correct this. In the larger central settlements of Haloze and Slovenske Gorice, in which there is a perceptible trend of population growth, municipal spatial planning documents **should define the areas for housing as well as for service and manufacturing activities**. In smaller more scattered settlements, we

propose that renovation take priority, particularly in the form of building replacement. In order to maintain population it will be necessary to designate areas for housing in these settlements as well. As a result of the traditional pattern of dispersed settlement in these places it is not possible to achieve compactness, so we propose that **small areas for construction of housing be located along main transportation routes and existing municipal infrastructure.** In this way there will be a concentration of settlement in zones along main traffic routes.

The network of **central settlements** consists of one center of national significance (Ptuj), one of regional significance (Ormož) and 35 local centers with level 1 and 2 classifications of centrality. In comparison with the situation in 1996, the establishment of new municipalities strengthened the network of level 1 and 2 centers, which had a favorable influence on improving accessibility to goods and services, especially in the Haloze and Slovenskih Gorice regions.

Ptuj over the last decade has strengthened its role as the largest supply and services center in the Lower Drava Valley. The spatial and functional development of the city has been characterized by the development of a large zone of services and manufacturing activities between Ormoška and Puhova streets. The Urban Municipality of Ptuj has designated a number of new areas for the expansion of this zone, which is favorable from the standpoint of attracting investment in service and manufacturing activities. However, along with this the municipality should give greater emphasis to comprehensive renewal and the economic **revitalization of the old city center.**

Economic activities are very unevenly distributed in the region of the Lower Drava Valley.

(1) There are **points of concentration** of economic activities and plants in so-called business-industrial zones. Larger zones are located mainly in the Drava Plain, but there are also some business and industrial zones at the edge of the Drava Plain (for example, Breg-Majšperk), a consequence of the policy of polycentric development. Nowadays we can see the creation (e.g. Markovci) or the planning (e.g. in the municipalities of Juršinci and Podlehnik) of business-industrial zones in particular municipalities in the Lower Drava Valley. Future development which is oriented towards small rural business-industrial zones associated with the expansion of existing areas, and the attraction and at least in the medium term the retaining of environmentally acceptable businesses, will be of great significance, since for small municipalities a high vacancy rate in the area of business-industrial zones represents a serious economic loss.

(2) Although the majority of **small business owners are spatially widely dispersed** throughout the various individual settlements of the Lower Drava Valley, there are greater concentrations in Ptuj and Ormož. More than half of the companies are headquartered in Ptuj, and one-eighth of them are located in Ormož. Regarding the chronology of their establishment, it is clear that after the collapse of the previous socio-political and economic system at the beginning of the 1990s, large companies were the first to be established, while small businesses lagged behind in development by about five years, which is understandable in view of the weak development of individual entrepreneurship and a lack of entrepreneurial thinking.

Current **supply** (of food, certain products, services, health care, etc.) is much better in

the rural settlements of the area studied than it was before the new municipalities were established. For the most part **basic supply services** were available in municipal centers while services which people require occasionally, and higher order public services (secondary schools) or specialized services (medical specialists, special purchases, etc.), were available in larger centers. The existing supply system thus required daily traveling for residents in areas with dispersed settlement (Slovenske Gorice, Haloze), as a result of which the majority use non-sustainable forms of transport such as private automobiles. Since the population of the area studied is aging rapidly and becoming less mobile, and the existing system of public supply (kindergartens, schools, pharmacies, etc.) is financially demanding, we should give serious thought to the development of a widely branched network of **mobile supply systems** (offered in a mobile form spatially).

Nationally and internationally the Lower Drava Valley is **not well enough known**; this can be changed by concerted effort towards a common regional promotion by the main actors, including in the field of **tourism and cultural heritage**.

An essential role in the field of tourism in the Lower Drava Valley in its current state as well as in its future development is played by **cultural heritage as broadly defined**, but its more intensive inclusion in development strategies for tourism as well as in specific forms is impeded in large part due to a lack of development thinking in heritage and cultural institutions and societies as well as in a lack of knowledge about cultural heritage and culture among those employed in the tourism sector.

In addition to cultural heritage, **protected areas in the Natura 2000 network, ecologically significant areas, and natural values** are of great importance in the region of the Lower Drava Valley. These have a protective as well as potentially a developmental component, but from the standpoint of sustainable development the latter must not predominate. **Better coordinated development of tourism** in the Lower Drava Valley requires greater dispersion of overnight capacities, and greater heterogeneity and constancy in amenities offered to tourists. This will have a crucial influence on the importance and role of tourism in the economic situation of the region as a whole as well as in its constituent municipalities.

Agriculture continues to have good prospects and is an economically and environmentally appropriate orientation for the region, but fundamental shifts in agricultural production itself are needed. It is necessary to think about the planned introduction of environmentally friendly forms of agricultural production, above all ecological farming methods. Changes are also required in the structure of production and the extent and manner of marketing of agricultural products.

With respect to the **future of agriculture in the Lower Drava Valley**, based on the assessments of farmers, more than half of farms will remain unchanged in their orientation and extent of production, fewer than a fifth of respondents see new opportunities for development of their farms, and a fourth of the farmers included in the analysis no longer see any future for themselves and are planning to gradually abandon farming and their farms.

Land use reflects conditions in the cultural landscape and management of the soil as a natural resource. Natural features and socio-economic factors as well as administrative measures are thus also reflected in spatial development. **Urbanization of land** and

with this the irreversible destruction of this natural resource is increasing in Slovenia and the Lower Drava Valley. There is also an increase in the **overgrowth of agricultural lands**, reducing the function of land for the production of food. Along with this can be perceived changes in the cultural landscape: the characteristic diversity of use (a mixture of cultivated fields, grassland, and woodland) is being rapidly lost with overgrowth and intensive building (a consequence of suburbanization and sprawl). There is already **degradation of the cultural landscape**.

Through a study of **cross-border relations** we found that people had real connections and were well-informed about and familiar with neighboring areas. There was also a perception of the advantages and disadvantages (problems) which arise as a consequence of a border location and established border regime. Through a survey of the residents we found that a fifth of the population living along the border had relatively good cross-border ties, but Croatia does not represent an employment destination for the Slovenian population. Among the problems of a border location, the ones most frequently cited by survey respondents were the increased police surveillance, the peripheral character of the area, and the problem of ownership of lands located on both sides of the border.

Residents throughout the entire region support the formation of the Lower Drava Valley as **an independent region**. Support for this idea was strongest in the Slovenske Gorice area and weakest in the most densely settled and urbanized area that includes Ptuj and Ormož. Viewpoints were relatively strongly entrenched in different population groups, which we can evaluate as a favorable circumstance, since there are no strong opponents of the idea. In determining the degree of support for the **naming of the region**, none of the possibilities suggested (the Ptuj-Ormož region, Eastern Styria, Lower Drava Valley) received majority support. There were some differences among the areas compared, but there was a general consensus that a special region in this area should be established.