

# Revitalizing Robidišče: Navigating the Challenges and Opportunities of Marginalized Rural Communities

*Katarina Polajnar Horvat*

ZRC SAZU, Anton Melik Geographical Institute, Slovenia

katarina.polajnar@zrc-sazu.si

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8872-529X>

This article deals with the revitalization of Robidišče, a village affected by depopulation and economic decline. Through the preservation of cultural heritage, sustainable tourism, and community engagement, the village has noticeably improved. The study examines how local efforts and external support have strengthened social cohesion and revitalization. Despite progress, challenges remain, highlighting the importance of further sustainable practices and community-oriented initiatives.

• **Keywords:** marginalization, rural revitalization, cultural heritage, tourism, sustainable development

V članku je obravnavana revitalizacija Robidišča, vasi, ki sta jo prizadeli izrazita depopulacija in gospodarsko nazadovanje. Z ohranjanjem kulturne dediščine, trajnostnim turizmom in dejavnostmi skupnosti je vas dosegla opazen napredek. V raziskavi je bila opravljena analiza, kako so lokalne pobude in zunanja podpora prispevale k večji socialni koheziji in oživljanju skupnosti. Kljub napredku pa ostaja niz izzivov, kar poudarja pomen nadaljnjih praks vzdržnosti in pobud, ki so usmerjene v skupnost.

• **Ključne besede:** marginalizacija, oživljanje podeželja, kulturna dediščina, turizem, trajnostni razvoj

## Introduction

Marginalization is a complex phenomenon that affects the lives of individuals and communities in a variety of ways (Nel, Pelc, 2020). It can be defined as a condition or process in which an individual or community is separated from broader social, economic and political networks, limiting access to resources, information, and connections that are critical to development and wellbeing (Leimgruber, 1994, 2004). In the humanities and social sciences, marginalization is studied from various perspectives, such as social, political, and economic (Pelc, 2017, 2018). Each of these dimensions sheds light on how disconnection from broader social networks affects individuals and communities.

In rural and remote regions, marginalization is often spatial because physical distance from urban centers increases social and economic challenges (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Doyon et al., 2020). These communities face limited access to basic services (e.g., healthcare, education, and connectivity), lack of infrastructure, fewer economic opportunities, and demographic decline because residents move to more developed areas (Kühn, 2015; Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Heffner, Latocha, 2020). Marginalization encompasses not only physical distance from urban centers, but also socioeconomic and cultural conditions that determine the functioning of communities in local and national

systems (Nel, Pelc, 2020). The lack of economic and political connections leads to the exclusion of these areas because they often lack the political and economic power to make decisions that affect their development and are consequently marginalized in social, economic, and political life (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Sørensen, Svendsen, 2023).

However, marginalization is not only negative. Despite spatial, economic, and political marginalization, these areas often have unique natural resources (e.g., water resources, plants, animals, etc.) and social resources such as cultural heritage and traditional practices that can be harnessed for their development. The preservation of local traditions, close ties to nature, and strong community cohesion are often strengths of marginalized areas, whereas these characteristics are more difficult to achieve in urban areas (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Anastasiou et al., 2021). Marginalization can also promote sustainable forms of development based on local natural and cultural assets that contribute to reducing dependence on external resources and strengthening local subsistence economies, including sustainable tourism (Razpotnik Visković, Komac, 2021).

There is a consensus in the geographical literature that marginal areas, such as rural and remote villages, are often labeled as “places that do not matter,” leading to their political and economic neglect (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Rodríguez-Pose et al., 2023; Sørensen, Svendsen, 2023). Furthermore, there are research gaps in investigating how these communities can defy isolation and utilize their unique characteristics for sustainable development. Most research has focused on the challenges that arise from marginalization, and less attention has been paid to the potential opportunities that arise from preserving the natural and cultural heritage and social capital of these areas (Sampson, Goodrich, 2009). Therefore, there is a need to explore practices that can promote resilience and sustainable development in marginalized communities.

In this context, the research focuses on Robidišče, the westernmost village in Slovenia, which has been marginalized for decades due to its location and its specific historical and socioeconomic conditions. Robidišče faces various challenges, particularly infrastructural, economic, and demographic, and this study analyzes whether these obstacles also present opportunities for community revitalization through sustainable tourism, preservation of cultural heritage, local agricultural practices, and strengthening of social cohesion, which could make possible sustainable use of local resources and reinforce community identity. This study analyzes how marginalization affects the socioeconomic conditions of the village and what strategies have been applied in Robidišče to reduce the effects of marginalization and strengthen community resilience. The study not only sheds light on the specific case of Robidišče, but also contributes to broader discussions on marginalization in rural areas and explores approaches that can make possible balanced and sustainable development in similar communities. The central research questions of this study are: 1) How has marginalization specifically impacted the socioeconomic conditions in Robidišče? 2) What strategies have been

applied in Robidišče to mitigate the effects of marginalization, and how have they contributed to strengthening community resilience? and 3) What key lessons from the case of Robidišče can be applied to similarly marginalized rural communities?

The research uses a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of marginalization in Robidišče. These methods include ethnographic fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, historical and demographic analysis, and institutional data review. In terms of structure, the article is organized as follows: the presentation of the theoretical background is followed by a section on methodology and presentation of the case study, an analysis, a discussion, and a conclusion.

### **Theoretical background**

Marginalization is not only a consequence of spatial distance from urban centers but also includes social and economic components that manifest themselves in the weaker connection of residents to regional and national networks and in limited opportunities for inclusion in broader social, political, and economic currents (Nel, Pelc, 2020). Marginalized areas are often neglected and excluded from development interventions and investments due to the lack of key resources such as adequate infrastructure, political power, and market access, which further exacerbates their backwardness (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; Nel, Pelc, 2020). Sørensen and Svendsen (2023) emphasize the role of political capital, which is crucial for the inclusion of marginalized communities in broader development processes. The lack of political capital means that residents of these areas do not have enough power to influence decisions that would grant them access to resources and development opportunities. This leads to further marginalization because these communities remain excluded from decision-making processes, reducing their chances of improving infrastructure, social, and economic conditions (Sørensen, Svendsen, 2023).

Such areas can be understood within the concept of “places that do not matter,” which refers to places that are often deemed unimportant by wider social and economic systems and are often systemically excluded. They are characterized by a lack of economic potential and political weight, which means that they do not attract enough attention and investment for their development. As a result, the living conditions of the residents deteriorate because there are few opportunities to improve infrastructure, economic growth, and participation in broader development processes. This situation favors demographic decline because young and employable residents migrate to more developed regions where opportunities are better. This leads to an aging population, a shrinking workforce, and lower economic productivity. This creates a vicious circle of marginalization that is difficult to overcome without external support or changes to development strategies (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018, 2020).



Despite the challenges faced by marginalized communities, their resilience and the ability to adapt to change, cope with it, and develop sustainable solutions despite the constraints are of great importance. Resilience encompasses both collective and individual adaptation strategies (Paniagua, 2017). Collective strategies often include community organization, self-sufficiency strategies for joint projects such as developing local infrastructure, strengthening local networks, and promoting sustainable economic activities. These strategies allow residents to connect with each other, share resources, and strengthen community cohesion, which improves their chances of survival in isolation. In addition to collective strategies, individual forms of resilience are also crucial, which include adapting to everyday conditions and finding innovative solutions to improve living standards (Paniagua, 2017).

Cultural heritage plays an important role in shaping resilience (Gocer et al., 2024). Preserving local practices and traditions allows residents to maintain their identity and connection to historical roots, which contributes to their sense of belonging and social cohesion. A sense of place creates a strong social network that allows residents to better cope with challenges and adapt to change (Sampson, Goodrich, 2009). Cultural heritage not only contributes to the preservation of community values but also opens up opportunities for economic development, particularly through sustainable tourism based on local values and characteristics. Sustainable tourism can thus be a key factor for resilience because it allows cultural heritage and natural resources to be included in tourism without losing their identity. This creates new economic opportunities, reduces dependence on traditional economic activities such as agriculture, and increases the resilience of the local population to wider economic changes (Stojanović et al., 2014). However, it is crucial that such initiatives be accompanied by appropriate investment in infrastructure, digital connectivity, and political participation because these elements are essential to break the cycle of marginalization.

One possible solution is the development of digital infrastructure. Access to digital services, such as broadband internet, allows residents of isolated areas to connect to broader economic flows and improve their social inclusion, access to education, labor markets, and social networks. Digital development also allows the creation of new forms of work and business opportunities and the diversification of the economy, which can help reduce the marginalization of these communities and improve their quality of life (Pervez et al., 2022). In addition to digital infrastructure, other strategies play an important role in addressing marginalization and fostering community resilience. One such strategy is sustainable tourism, which aims to develop tourism while respecting local resources, traditions, and environmental limits. This approach can promote economic growth while preserving cultural heritage and ensuring long-term sustainability (Stojanović et al., 2014). The preservation of cultural heritage itself is another crucial strategy because it helps maintain traditional practices, architecture, and local history, all of which are key to strengthening a community's identity and resilience in the face of external pressures (Gocer et al., 2024).

Agricultural revitalization and local production have also emerged as important components in reducing marginalization. By reintroducing traditional agricultural practices and fostering local food production, communities can reduce their dependence on external markets and build more sustainable local economies (Razpotnik Visković, Komac, 2021). Finally, social cohesion and community engagement are vital strategies for promoting resilience. Strong community bonds and active participation are essential for both economic resilience and social wellbeing because they make collective action possible and support networks that help communities adapt to change (Paniagua, 2017).

## Methodology

This research on the marginalization of Robidišče was based on qualitative methods that provided comprehensive insight into the various dimensions of this complex phenomenon. The ethnographic research was conducted in Robidišče during a five-day stay in August 2023 and via Zoom with residents that were not present at that time. During my stay I had extensive contact with the residents because I stayed with them. I observed their daily lives, spent days with them, participated in their chores, and followed how they cope with the challenges of living in the village. This interaction gave me unique insight into their way of life, their values, and their way of building a community.

The study involved fifteen semi-structured interviews with permanent or seasonal residents; that is, those that stay in the village on weekends or during the summer. The interviews were designed to cover important topics such as living conditions, social cohesion, economic activities, perception of isolation, infrastructure, sustainable tourism, and the future of the village. In this way, I obtained qualitative data on the subjective experiences and views of the residents. I gained a better understanding of the living conditions and attitudes in the village. This allowed me to follow the local living and environmental practices more closely and to get to know the people that live there better. I also got to know people for whom Robidišče is a place of seasonal work or vacation, either for a day or for several days, and observed their activities. I also analyzed the population statistics of Robidišče from 1869 to 2023 (SiSTAT, 2024), which provides information on demographic changes and migration trends. The research also involved the local community, which provided additional data and insights and strengthened local support for the research efforts.

### **Research area**

The study area, Robidišče, is located in the Breginj Combe, in far western Slovenia, at the crossroads of three cultures, between the Venetian Slovenian hinterland, the Romance world, and Friuli (Ščukovt, 2016). The village borders on neighboring Italy, which borders it to the north, west, and south (Figure 1). Between 1815 and 1866,

the area belonged to Austria, and in 1866 it was annexed to the Kingdom of Italy. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Robidišče was a prosperous village for the time, with forty-two houses on the Austrian side of the border between Austria and Italy (Ščukovt, 2019). Although Robidišče belonged to the Austrian side, its population had regular contact with the Venetian (or Italian) side (Kladnik, 1977). In the period after the First World War, the entire Littoral area belonged to Italy. Thus, economic and social contacts with the nearby villages of Prossenicco, Montefosca, and other villages in Venetian Slovenia increased. It is no coincidence that Robidišče has a Mediterranean architectural identity, just like the rest of Venetian Slovenia and the Breginj Combe (Miklavčič-Brezigar, 1995). In 1869, the village had 178 residents, by 1910 the number of residents had risen to 228, and since then the population has declined sharply. In 1991, the village had only seventeen residents, in 2000 only eight, in 2010 also eight, in 2020 eleven, and in 2023 seventeen (SiSTAT, 2024). The last child was born in the village in 1981.

After the Second World War, when the Littoral was annexed to Yugoslavia, Robidišče ended up on the Yugoslav side. The new border between Italy and Yugoslavia, which ran directly behind the village, cut it off completely from its natural hinterland in Venetian Slovenia, with which the residents had maintained close ties for centuries (Miklavčič-Brezigar, 1995). The darker history of the village began after 1947, when the current border was established, separating Robidišče from Venetian Slovenia. The Yugoslav army and the communist regime imposed a new social order on the village



Figure 1: Robidišče is the westernmost village in Slovenia, and it is bordered on three sides by Italy. Author: Manca Volk Bahun.

and exerted considerable political and psychological pressure on the residents. The loss of ties with neighboring villages, with which the residents of Robidišče had been closely connected, led to a deep sense of disconnection and insecurity for many. As a result, between 1947 and 1952, almost half of the residents emigrated across the border to Italy and from there to the rest of the world, mainly to North and South America. More than 150 locals left under cover of darkness with carts and whatever they could carry. The reasons for their emigration were either political or economic, but also the fact that people had lost contact with the places across the border that they had been connected to for many years. Relationships with neighboring villages across the border were part of their identity and daily life, and so the loss of these ties was particularly painful. However, it is important to note that this experience was not unique to Robidišče or the border regions. After the Second World War, similar migrations occurred throughout Yugoslavia, with many people leaving their homes in search of a better life. This is reminiscent of Wright's 2002 book *The Village that Died for England*; in the case of Robidišče, one could speak of "the village that died for Yugoslavia." The homes in the village began to fall into disrepair, and many houses were abandoned for good. Then came industrialization and the abandonment of agriculture, which led to further exodus from the village. The 1976 earthquake with a magnitude of around 8, which changed the face of the village, also contributed to the exodus. Only a few people remained in the village. Reconstruction after the earthquake was never fully completed, and the houses remained largely empty (Miklavčič-Brezigar, 2001). Nevertheless, the characteristics of Mediterranean architecture typical of the entire Breginj region have been preserved, and Robidišče is no exception.

The revitalization of Robidišče and the restoration of the dilapidated houses in the village began in 1995 with the organization of the event From the North, South, East, and West (encompassing several border towns). A group of locals and friends of Robidišče founded a group called Preserve Robidišče, which officially became part of the Stol Cultural Association in 1998. The aim of the group was to preserve cultural heritage through cultural and tourist events titled Let's Get to Know Each Other and other activities aimed at preserving the westernmost village in Slovenia (Ščukovt, 2016). Inga Miklavčič-Brezigar from the Gorizia Museum wrote in the brochure *Robidišče: vas med življenjem in smrtjo ali kako prižgati iskro na ugaslem ognjišču* (Robidišče: A Village between Life and Death, or How to Rekindle a Fire on an Extinguished Hearth) that this was the moment when Robidišče awoke (Miklavčič-Brezigar, 1995). At that time, the restoration of dilapidated and abandoned buildings began, and various volunteer camps for students of different disciplines were organized under the umbrella of the ŠKUC organization. Thus, Robidišče began to revive through the efforts of volunteers, mostly students and not just locals. Otherwise, the revival of the village would have been in question because there were only a handful of young people in the village at the time, and even they were only occasional residents. Through their youth,

work, and enthusiasm, they helped change and improve the social status of the older citizens. Since then, various events and activities have been carried out in Robidišče, including museographic endeavors, ethnographic and geographic projects and camps, social support, systematic media promotion, publishing work, and other activities that have contributed to the recognition of the village (Kravanja, 1999; Ščukovt, 2016).

An important factor in the revitalization of the village was the return of a local farmer, who revived agriculture, especially livestock breeding and the associated production of dairy products, which had a positive effect on the previously intensively overgrown cultivated landscape. Grazing and mowing of the meadows was resumed, and a communal barn and hayloft were built.

Another important milestone for the reconstruction of the village was the adoption of the Act on the Reconstruction of Structures after the Earthquake and the Promotion of Development in the Soča Valley (*Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia* no. 45/98), following the 1998 earthquake in the Soča Valley. On the basis of this law, the village and its residents received financial resources that were used to reconstruct homes (Mesec, 2013). One woman from the village stated that “*after the earthquake*” in 1998 “*there were funds, and that was an opportunity to renovate this house.*” The creation of one of the country’s first cross-border cycle paths, developed as part of the PHARE-CBC cross-border initiative in 1998, also had a significant impact on development. The Municipality of Kobarid played a key role in planning and implementing the project, which made it possible to connect Robidišče with the surrounding tourist routes. This cycling trail attracted many tourists that passed through the village on their way to other destinations, which contributed to greater awareness of the area and an increase in tourist visits. The opening of the trail enhanced opportunities for sustainable tourism development because tourists began to discover the natural beauty, cultural heritage, and uniqueness of Robidišče, leading to an increase in economic activity in the village and connections with other cross-border areas. Although at first glance the history of Robidišče could be interpreted as a story of perseverance and resilience, it is more appropriate to understand it as a story of change, adaptation, and the search for new ways of life in changing circumstances. The former agricultural lifestyle gradually disappeared after the earthquake and social changes, as did the traditional way of life that had been part of the community for centuries. In the 1990s, the revival of the village began, characterized mainly by tourism, weekend visits, cross-border projects, and efforts to preserve and enhance cultural heritage. Robidišče, as part of the wider Breginj Combe and Upper Soča Valley, entered a new era in which the remoteness and tranquility of the place are promoted as unique values, positioning it as a place of peace, relaxation, recreation, and spiritual growth.

A monument with the inscription *Le kam ste vsi odšli?* (Where have you all gone?) stands at the end of the village of Robidišče, just before the border with Italy, and commemorates the emigration of many of the village’s residents in the past (Figure 2).





Figure 2: *Where Have You All Gone?* A monument in Robidišče commemorating the emigration of the residents. Photo: Katarina Polajnar Horvat, 10.7.2024.

The monument was erected in 2013 by local residents and students as part of the Woodstone workshop to commemorate the exodus that followed the historical events after the Second World War, when a new border separated Robidišče from its natural hinterland and led to many migrations due to political, economic, and social pressures. The monument is located at the place where the border was felt most strongly by the community, at the very edge of the village. It symbolizes the transition and loss of contact with previous connections across the border and, on the other hand, also points to the end of one way of life and the beginning of another, unknown way of life for those that left.

## Analysis

### ***Community and demographics of Robidišče***

In 2023, there were seventeen officially registered residents in Robidišče, ten of whom lived permanently in the village and the rest part time. Several families that are second- or third-generation descendants of the residents of Robidišče have renovated their houses and occasionally come to the village from various parts of Slovenia. They come mainly on weekends, during vacations, and in the summer. In recent years, social cohesion in the village has grown thanks to active and committed people. The younger generations returning to the village are an important turning point in the demographic and social dynamics. Over the last two years, since a new chairman took over the management of the agricultural community, the community has met regularly and together developed a vision for the village, which it summarizes as follows:

a village designed according to the needs of the residents, mowed, houses restored, walls repaired, safe ruins, polished country houses, multifunctional spaces, a clean river and a focus on sustainability for guests, vegetable gardens and tree plantations, an inn, a farm, cleared pastures where crossings are possible, marked hiking and cycling trails, cows, sheep, and goats, walking families, children playing, cyclists and hikers, school groups, an open-air museum with old photos, a multipurpose room, benches in the village and at viewpoints, chickens and (tidy) manure heaps, firewood, or stones. (Mesec, 2022)

There are currently no children under age fifteen living permanently in the village. Two children are officially registered in the village and attend elementary school in the nearby larger village of Breginj. They live permanently in Italy, just over the Slovenian border, and are descendants of the last child born in Robidišče. The main reason why the children attend the Slovenian school in Breginj is that their parents want to maintain contact with Slovenian language and culture.

### ***Economic activities and challenges***

Most of the permanent residents are retired. Those that are gainfully employed are engaged in various activities. In Robidišče, there are few opportunities to earn a living from just one activity. As the owner of a farm that lives on the other side of the border but was born in Robidišče said: “*You can not make a living here with one activity, you have to have several things, otherwise you can not do it.*” He runs a tourism business in the summer, he has a farm, he ploughs in the winter, and he mows and landscapes the roadsides in the spring. In this way, he has a sustainable livelihood. Agriculture in the village has largely been abandoned. The migration of residents for better job

opportunities, better education, and better quality of life in terms of services has led to a decline in the workforce that continues to farm. In addition, the land in the village and its immediate surroundings is highly fragmented, which often makes farming financially unsustainable.

Small farmers do not have the means to make the necessary investments—and, even if they had them, they could not use them because the terrain in Robidišče and the surrounding area is too rugged. Traditional farming in these areas has always consisted of grazing and mowing, which helps preserve the grassland. In recent years, however, grazing and mowing have been abandoned. There have been no cows in the village for several years. The residents are indifferent to the appearance of the village. The village is overgrown, and it is not mowed. *“It makes me sad that the village is slowly being abandoned, it makes me sad because this village is so beautiful to me and it makes me sad to see it abandoned like this. It’s a real shame that it’s being neglected like this,”* said a young pensioner that spends the warm season in the village. She also pointed out that the hiking trails are quite overgrown: *“The footpaths are not maintained, everything is overgrown, which is a shame because we do not all come up to cycle, some of us would go hiking but you can not because the grass is too high.”*

Nevertheless, the residents largely try to look after themselves, they have their own gardens, and some keep animals such as chickens, sheep, or goats. There are also efforts to allow cows to graze in the village again.

### ***Institutional support and collaborative efforts***

An important factor in the revitalization of Robidišče was the role of various institutional initiatives that contributed to the development of the village. The Municipality of Kobarid, for example, played a central role in supporting infrastructure and tourism projects, including the creation of cross-border connections with neighboring Italy. One notable initiative was the development of one of the first cross-border cycling routes, funded under the PHARE CBC program, which increased the visibility of Robidišče and connected it to wider tourism networks. As one resident noted, *“The cross-border bike trail really put us on the map. Before, only a few people knew about Robidišče, but now we get cyclists and hikers passing through, and that’s brought some life back to the village.”*

Another initiative was the inclusion of Robidišče in the Natura 2000 network, which focuses on the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity. This framework has been instrumental in ensuring that the development of the area adheres to certain environmental standards, preserving the natural heritage while allowing sustainable tourism growth. In addition, local organizations such as the Soča Valley Development Center have actively supported the revitalization efforts. The center promoted projects aimed at marketing Robidišče as a tourist destination while focusing on heritage preservation. The center’s initiatives included holding cultural events, developing educational trails, and creating promotional materials highlighting the village’s unique cultural and natural



treasures. As one interviewee mentioned, *“The Soča Valley Development Center has been really helpful. They contributed to Robidišče having public transport, at least in summer, which has significantly improved connections to the village, and they’ve helped us with getting funding for some of the repairs in the village.”*

These institutional efforts have not only provided financial and logistical support but also connected Robidišče to larger networks that allow access to resources that would otherwise be difficult to obtain. As one long-term resident reflected, *“Without the support of the municipality and projects like PHARE-CBC, I don’t think the tourists would be here in such numbers.”*

### **Community identity**

Some residents identify themselves with the term *Rbiščani* (Robidišče residents), which indicates a rather narrow and specific identity closely linked to the place. In this way, they reflect a strong local attachment and pride in their surroundings. In the case of Robidišče, this is no coincidence because historical, cultural, and kinship circumstances have created a strong identity and cohesion that has allowed the community to survive. The village’s connection with the Breginj Combe has also played a crucial role in shaping its identity because the cultural and historical ties with the surrounding villages have helped maintain social bonds and support. Although the natural conditions of the village and its surroundings, with its remoteness and the age structure of the population, do not at first glance offer tangible circumstances for positive development, its appearance has had a strong influence on those that have left it weekly, monthly, or even for several years or decades. The emigrants and their descendants are happy to return to their old, half-destroyed homes, which are slowly being rebuilt. They make an important contribution to the revitalization of the village. Most of them are locals that worked elsewhere in their youth and are now retired. They live temporarily in Robidišče during the warm season and on weekends. They have time and are motivated to participate in organizing local events and restoring and preserving cultural heritage, thus contributing to the creation of a local identity. Institutions such as the Municipality of Kobarid and the Soča Valley Development Center have also supported these efforts, fostering connections between Robidišče and the wider region, the Breginj Combe, and even the Soča Valley. The returning residents are also a source of rich knowledge about the village, traditional customs and habits, life experiences, and traditional values, and a source of passing on tasks, local stories, and legends to younger generations. They make a significant contribution to the local economy by investing in and renovating properties, revitalizing the gardens around their houses, and landscaping the immediate surroundings of their homes. One of them said that Robidišče *“is a special place that has a special energy, such a positive energy because there is so much greenery here.”* Their presence goes beyond simple restoration efforts. It fosters a deeper connection to the community’s cultural roots. This ongoing commitment ensures that Robidišče retains

its unique character and gives future generations the opportunity to experience a way of life that is becoming increasingly rare in today's fast-paced world. As another resident said, *"Our efforts are not just for us, but also for the children that come here so they can see and understand where they come from and why this place is so important."*

### ***Tourism development***

In 2002, intensive restoration of architectural heritage for tourist purposes began, in particular the renovation of the Škvor farm. After the renovation was completed in 2006, the first visitor accommodation was opened in the village. Later, the family restored the old family barn and acquired other outbuildings. Shortly after the Škvor farm was renovated, other farms that had been saved by their owners were also restored. In 2010, the village had twenty guest beds. To date, several abandoned buildings have been renovated and converted into tourist facilities. The owner describes his vision as follows: *"We believe that in life we must not only take, but also preserve, so that what our ancestors created is preserved for our descendants. We see Robidišče as a leap out of our comfort zone and a testing ground for the development and implementation of ideas."*

After 2010, a local man that was reviving farming began to develop the idea of a vacation farm. After working in transportation for many years and spending many days on the road in various countries, he decided, as he described, *"to settle down in one place, in my home village, it was a call for my home village, for nostalgia, for an idyll, and for village life."*

At first he offered dairy products, but, as time went on and demand grew, he began to offer traditional dishes from northeastern Italy and western Slovenia, such as frittata, polenta, gnocchi, minestrone, lamb in sauce, and so on. His ancestors had always made cheese, although they had cows, whereas today he keeps dairy sheep. The farm became a tourist business, offering accommodation in a restored house and a campsite. Later, the owner decided to sell the house and had to close the guesthouse and campsite due to a lack of operating licenses. He believes that *"running a farm is a lot of work and you don't get back as much as you put in,"* but he will continue when his permits are reinstated.

The buyer of the house has converted the entire building into a cycling center with a bed and breakfast and a bar. He has also built six single-lane cycle paths on the slopes between the village and the Nadiža River. The center flourished for seven years, but then the owner was forced to close all the trails due to disagreements over the use of the mountain bike trails. The facility is still in operation and offers accommodation and other amenities. While it was operational, the center attracted many mountain bikers and hikers, resulting in an increase in tourist traffic as visitors began to explore the local attractions and enjoy the natural beauty of the area. However, in addition to the positive effects, the opening of the center also had some negative consequences. *"Robidišče suddenly went from being a forgotten village to a mountain bike center,"*



commented one local resident. She said: *“At a certain time, especially during COVID-19, when Slovenians flocked here to spend their vacation vouchers, it was very crowded, too crowded. People parked everywhere—on the roadside, on the streets, on private properties. Not to mention the noise at night when the tourists were partying. We do not want that in the village, so it’s a real blessing that the hiking trails are closed this year.”*

Given these challenges, it is clear from the residents’ concerns that tourism must develop within a framework of sustainable practices. Several interviewees expressed worry that unplanned tourism could lead to environmental degradation and the loss of the natural and cultural values that make Robidišče unique. These discussions emphasize how strongly residents prioritize sustainability, viewing it as essential for preserving the village’s character. Their emphasis on participatory planning further reflects the community’s desire to be actively involved in shaping tourism development, ensuring that it is based on the responsible use of local resources. This collective sentiment underscores the importance of sustainability as a key issue in Robidišče, as one resident emphasized: *“It is important to attract tourists, but we have to be careful not to lose what makes us special—our nature and the tranquility we find here. We do not want Robidišče to become a tourist attraction that loses its authenticity. We want people to understand and respect our way of life.”*

An example of best practice in sustainable tourism is the approach of a young family living just over the border in Italy. The family runs a vacation farm based on the principles of sustainability, local self-sufficiency, and coexistence with nature. The young co-owner explained: *“We live in a valley on the border with Slovenia, isolated from the rest of the world and immersed in the magical energy of this place.”* They focus on using locally grown organic produce and have increasingly turned to vegetarian and vegan cuisine in recent years to promote sustainability.

*“Living in harmony with animals and nature has led us to offer almost exclusively vegetarian and vegan dishes in recent years, which gives our cuisine a unique and refined flavor,”* he explains. This practice not only supports environmental protection, but also offers visitors a healthy culinary experience in the middle of the local environment. Deer and other animals are bred on the farm, and a wide range of vegetables and medicinal herbs are grown, creating a model for self-sufficiency. The co-owner emphasizes how important the connection to nature is: *“In Robidišče there has always been a special energy of the people and the place, which you can still feel today. It’s open here, the wind, the air; it’s always more difficult than in the valley, but we find peace here.”*

After living in the city, the family decided to return to this area to show their commitment to a simpler and more meaningful way of life, which she wants to pass on to her children. *“You have to want to work on a farm, that’s my thing. If you can’t, you give up—it’s too hard; here you work all day, every day,”* said the co-owner, emphasizing the dedication required to maintain this way of life.

### ***Infrastructure issues***

In addition to the lack of well-planned tourist development, one of the shortcomings of the village is its infrastructure. The village's water supply comes from Italy, where it is the main source for Robidišče and some of the villages on the Italian side. The water intake is also co-managed by the Municipality of Kobarid. In the long term, problems with ownership and water rights are expected over this point, which will have to be resolved at an international level. In the past, the water supply from Italy was unstable at times, which is why a larger water reservoir was built in 2018. Part of the water pipeline and a pipeline for fire hydrants were also built. Nevertheless, water is conserved in summer, the public wells are closed, and water is transported from Kobarid. The village is also not equipped with a sewage system. In the future, it would be worth planning joint investment in communal wastewater disposal; for example, in a joint sewage treatment plant.

The electricity grid is well developed. Solar panels have been installed on the roof of the communal barn. The residents have expressed their interest in buying or renovating the current solar panel system to contribute to the village's self-sufficiency. On the other hand, the village lacks an adequate internet connection. This can be remedied by purchasing signal boosters and more powerful modems—which, however, are associated with higher costs. One of the interviewee mentioned: *“We had to invest in signal boosters to be able to use the internet at all.”* There is great interest in this because it would make it easier to work remotely, contact a doctor, and study remotely, and it would facilitate digital administration. The road to the village is poorly maintained and narrow. People feel uncomfortable driving on the road: *“I am afraid someone will get hurt or have an accident because the road is so bad; we need something safer.”* There is also no store in the village. There is a traveling grocery store once a week, but only in summer. This makes it difficult for immobile residents to access essential goods such as food, medicine, and hygiene products. According to one resident, people feel dependent on others, but on the other hand they have always managed in their own way: *“I grow a lot of my own food in my garden, I plan my shopping in advance and make a list so that I don't forget anything important. That way I can avoid unnecessary trips. Sometimes we swap what we grow, or, if we don't have something, we borrow it from a neighbor.”*

The president of the agrarian community described the subsistence system as follows: *“A small local economy has developed in the village in terms of local supply of vegetables, dairy products, eggs, and also some meat products, so that both locals and guests within the village are largely self-sufficient.”*

A major challenge in the village is the abandoned buildings and the land surrounding them, which is partly due to the complex ownership structure and partly due to the fragmentation of the land. Many of the owners of the buildings and land are deceased or live abroad, which makes it difficult to obtain permits to legally renovate the properties.

To make matters worse, locals have long been reluctant to sell their properties to newcomers, even to people from nearby Kobarid, because they are seen as outsiders. As a result, many buildings remain vacant and their surroundings are gradually becoming overgrown, which has a negative impact on the overall character and vitality of the village. The increasing overgrowth of the land and the village's character is mainly a consequence of the abandonment of agricultural activity.

### ***New nonnative residents and their impact***

In recent years, an interesting trend of immigration to Robidišče has been observed, with some people from the United States, Germany, and elsewhere in Slovenia settling permanently in the village. The reasons for their arrival are quite similar: *“When I first came to the village, I thought: this is paradise on earth. The beauty of nature, and the peace and tranquility captivated me so much that I was immediately convinced to buy this house. Here I’m directly connected to nature; I wake up every day with a view of Mount Krn”*; *“The village offered me the chance for a new beginning. Here I’ve found my place where I can realize my dreams, lead a simpler lifestyle, less stressful and in contact with nature. The village has strong energy, and the Nadiža River is a particularly mystical place for me that radiates mysticism.”*

On the one hand, the permanent residents see this as an advantage. As one of them said, *“The presence of foreigners has brought a breath of fresh air, new ideas, and world views to our village.”* On the other hand, some of them see it as negative: *“People come to the village who have no history here, no roots; they travel to work far away and have no sense of belonging to this place.”*

The fourth generation of local children, who come on weekends and during the summer vacations, has great potential to further revitalize the village. Although they do not live in Robidišče permanently, the children of the residents are emotionally and culturally connected to the village and bring life to it. Weekend and holiday visits allow them to connect with their family roots, traditions, and the nature of the village. The parents of these children have chosen to renovate old houses and properties, which contributes to the revitalization of the village. Such renovations not only improve the infrastructure, but also attract other visitors and potential residents. The organization of various events, workshops, and social gatherings strengthens the sense of community and encourages cooperation between permanent and temporary residents and visitors. This could lead to a new wave of residents that will further revitalize the village. Young people bring fresh ideas and perspectives. Their presence can lead to new projects and initiatives that contribute to the development of Robidišče and create new opportunities for work and life.

The interaction and connection with the local environment—and with it the natural hinterland of Venetian Slovenia and also with the Breginj Combe—is still intense. A number of relatives that have moved away from the village live in these nearby regions



and are still connected to the area through various activities. The municipality holds many events for the locals themselves and for visitors from outside. The owners of the Škvor farm have created a gallery in a protected former barn that houses a small museum and a permanent photo collection, which is available as a space for community events, workshops, meetings, and lectures. The village is also home to an open-air museum with old photos. This helps promote the cultural character of the village and thus its profile as a tourist destination.

Interestingly, the new nonnative residents and temporary residents, especially those from urban centers, often feel more exposed than in the urban environment. “*I feel even more exposed here,*” says the owner of the former Robidišče mountain bike center. In the cities, you can hide in the crowd, and anonymity allows for a certain degree of privacy and invisibility. In Robidišče, where the community is small and close-knit, such anonymity is not possible. Each individual is known and recognized, which creates a sense of greater personal presence. Conversely, being in a smaller, closer-knit environment often leads to a feeling of both inclusion and acceptance or, conversely, exclusion and rejection. People integrate more quickly into the community, build closer interpersonal relationships, and socialize with their neighbors. This sense of belonging and social support can offset or even overcome the benefits of anonymity offered by city life. Conversely, being in such a small and cohesive environment can also increase feelings of marginalization if newcomers are not accepted or have difficulty fitting in. In contrast, the long-established residents do not feel marginalized because they have adapted well to life in this place. Older residents are more critical of marginalization, mainly because they feel forgotten by the land and because they do not have as many opportunities for employment or profitable agricultural activities. Nevertheless, they have developed strong interpersonal ties and independence that allow them to live successfully in such an environment. On the other hand, non-natives living temporarily or newly in Robidišče mainly see the positive aspects of marginalization. For them, living in Robidišče is an escape from everyday life, an opportunity to relax and retreat from the hustle and bustle of the city. They enjoy the peace, nature, and a close-knit community, and they appreciate the opportunity to work remotely or simply enjoy retired life without the stress and hustle and bustle. As one interviewee said, “*Robidišče is isolation par excellence.*” Robidišče is seen as marginalization in its purest form, not necessarily because of its physical remoteness or distance from large cities and infrastructure, but because of the unique interplay of historical, cultural, social, and psychological factors that have shaped its current state. Although it is true that Robidišče is located in a border area and is geographically somewhat removed from urban centers, the marginalization of the village is more a product of historical events, cultural dynamics, and sociopolitical changes than mere physical distance. This marginalization refers not only to physical distance, but also to a way of life that is associated with less connectivity to modern urban centers, limited access to services



and infrastructure, and closer ties to the local community. The term “isolation per se” characterizes Robidišče as a prime example of a place that embodies all the characteristics and consequences of geographical and social marginalization.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Research on Robidišče offers insights into the complex processes that shape life in marginalized areas and provides important insights into how such communities can develop sustainable solutions to improve quality of life despite their limitations. Marginalization, defined as disconnection from broader social, economic, and political networks, is often an obstacle to development, but at the same time it opens up opportunities for the search for alternative development pathways. Robidišče is an excellent example of how communities can successfully overcome the challenges posed by spatial, economic, and social marginalization and transform these challenges into opportunities for sustainable development.

Although the municipality almost disintegrated after the Second World War, when the new border between Yugoslavia and Italy cut Robidišče off from its natural hinterland in Venetian Slovenia, there have been attempts at revitalization in recent decades that have been crucial to its survival. After the war, many residents emigrated, some homesteads were abandoned, and the population decline was drastic, leading Robidišče into a period of stagnation. Nevertheless, the preservation of the village became the concern of young volunteers that began setting up volunteer work camps and restoring abandoned buildings in the 1990s. These people became the driving force behind the revival. Their energy and commitment provided opportunities to restore the cultural heritage and revitalize the village. Around the same time, municipal support for the restoration of Robidišče increased because the Municipality of Kobarid, together with various organizations, facilitated the revival through cross-border initiatives such as PHARE CBC. This institutional support was key to restoring the basic conditions for life and sustainable development.

Social cohesion in Robidišče is not as strong as one would expect in such a small municipality, partly due to the ongoing population decline and the fact that most current residents are seasonal or weekend residents. Nevertheless, it is these few residents and occasional visitors that have established a network of cooperation and connections that maintains the basic vitality of the village. Despite the remoteness and sense of isolation often attributed to Robidišče, the village’s close historical and cultural ties to the neighboring villages in the Breginj Combe cannot be overlooked. The links to the Breginj Combe are important for social cohesion because they continue to facilitate cooperation, the exchange of resources, and community support. Rodríguez-Pose (2018) emphasizes that even places with limited social cohesion and limited connections to larger social

networks can find opportunities for revitalization through collaboration, as seen in Robidišče through the involvement of volunteers and the organization of cultural events. Local cultural and social resources such as architectural heritage, traditional practices, and social ties between residents have been shown to be key factors in strengthening community resilience. This is confirmed by Gocer et al. (2024), who emphasize the importance of cultural heritage in maintaining local identity and promoting social cohesion.

The development of sustainable tourism based on local natural and cultural resources was an important step in the revitalization of Robidišče. It was supported, among others, by the Municipality of Kobarid and regional organizations such as the Soča Valley Development Center, which facilitated funding and organized projects for the restoration and development of tourist infrastructure. Tourism began to develop more intensively after 2002, when abandoned buildings were restored and basic infrastructure for visitors was created. This opened up new economic opportunities for the residents and raised the profile of the village. However, the uncontrolled development of tourism also brought with it the risk of overloading the area because the growing number of visitors put a strain on the infrastructure and the environment. The findings of Sørensen and Svendsen (2023) confirm that the development of such areas requires careful planning that involves all stakeholders and encourages community participation.

The role of younger generations returning to Robidišče and reintroducing old farming practices is also particularly important. Young people working in tourism and agriculture are an example of the successful combination of tradition and modern sustainable approaches. Their focus on local production, ecologically oriented cuisine, and sustainable tourism not only preserves cultural heritage, but also strengthens the local economy. Such initiatives show that local residents can play a key role in the development of sustainable strategies if they have the support and opportunity to participate in these processes.

The demographic changes in Robidišče show that immigration and seasonal and weekend migration continue to have a significant impact on the vitality of the municipality. The presence of new residents, whether outsiders or weekend returnees that maintain their ties to the village, can have positive effects, such as new ideas and energy for community revitalization. However, it can also lead to feelings of exclusion if these new residents are not sufficiently integrated into local life or accepted by the long-established, which can lead to tensions between locals and newcomers. This ambivalent dynamic is characteristic of many marginalized communities, in which the arrival of new residents can lead to either renewal or conflict. Therefore, involving everyone in the development processes is essential for building a resilient community.

In addition to these social aspects, the infrastructure in Robidišče is key to the long-term sustainability of the village. Challenges such as dependence on Italian water sources, limited access to health services, and poor digital connectivity are significant barriers to further development. It is therefore crucial to improve basic services and

connectivity, which would allow Robidišče to become more integrated into wider economic and social networks. The development of digital infrastructure and improved access to basic services would facilitate the lives of residents, reduce isolation, and allow greater community participation in modern sustainable development trends.

Despite these challenges, Robidišče has successfully transformed its limitations into opportunities for sustainable development. Involving residents in restoration and tourism projects, strengthening social cohesion, developing sustainable tourism, and preserving cultural heritage are key elements that have helped transform Robidišče into a more dynamic and resilient community. At the same time, it is important to maintain a balance between economic development and the preservation of local values to ensure long-term sustainability and improve the quality of life of residents. This represents a holistic approach to the development of marginalized areas, in which the local population plays a key role in decision-making and implementing development measures.

### Acknowledgements

This research was financially supported by the Slovenian Research and Innovation Agency, by the research program Geography of Slovenia: P6-0101, and by the basic research project Isolated People and Communities in Slovenia and Croatia: J6-4610.

### References

- Anastasiou, Evgenia, Stella Manika, Konstantina Ragazou, and Ioannis Katsios. 2021. Territorial and Human Geography Challenges: How Can Smart Villages Support Rural Development and Population Inclusion? *Societies* 10 (6): 193. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10060193>.
- Doyon, Mélanie, Juan-Luis Klein, and Pierre-André Tremblay. 2020. Community Action Against Marginalization: The Case of a Rural Social Enterprise in Quebec. In *Responses to Geographical Marginality and Marginalization*, eds. Etienne Nel, Stanko Pelc, 23–44. Cham: Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51342-9>.
- Gocer Ozgur, Didem Boyacioglu, Ebru Ergoz Karahan, and Shrestha Pranita. 2024. Cultural Tourism and Rural Community Resilience: A Framework and Its Application. *Journal of Rural Studies* 107. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2024.103238>.
- Heffner, Krystian and Agnieszka Latocha. 2020. Desolated Villages as Examples of Spatial, Economic and Social Marginalization in the Polish-Czech Borderland. In *Responses to Geographical Marginality and Marginalization*, eds. Etienne Nel, Stanko Pelc, 123–142. Cham: Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51342-9>.
- Kladnik, Drago. 1977. Earthquake Effects on the Example of the Less Developed Area of the Breginj Corner. Thesis, University of Ljubljana. Ljubljana.
- Kravanja, Boštjan. 1999. Najzahodnejša slovenska vas Robidišče: spomini na naš čas. In *Oddaljeni pogledi na Breginjski kot*, eds. Boštjan Kravanja, Petra Kajzer, Melita Škrlec, Marjeta Skrt, and Sergej Ciani. Breginj: ŠKUC.

- Kühn, Manfred. 2015. Peripheralization: Theoretical Concepts Explaining Socio-Spatial Inequalities. *European Planning Studies* 23 (2): 367–378. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2013.862518>.
- Leimgruber, Walter. 1994. Marginality and Marginal Regions: Problems of Definition. In *Marginality and Development Issues in Marginal Regions*, 1–18. Taipei: National Taiwan University.
- Leimgruber, Walter. 2004. *Between Global and Local. Marginality and Marginal Regions in the Context of Globalization and Deregulation*. Oxon, New York: Routledge.
- Mesec, Staša. 2013. Revitalisation of the Mountain Village Robidišče Along the Slovenian-Italian Border. *Trink's Calendar* 55 (1). Cultural Association Ivan Trinko, Cooperative Lipa.
- Mesec, Staša. 2022. *Robidišče 2.2: Vision, Values, Situation, Actions. Starting Points for the Preparation of a Joint Development Strategy for the Village of Robidišče*. Robidišče, 2.2.2022.
- Miklavčič-Brezigar, Inga. 1995. *Robidišče: vas med življenjem in smrtjo ali kako prižgati iskro na ugaslem ognjišču*. Turistično društvo Breginj, Goriški muzej.
- Miklavčič-Brezigar, Inga. 2001. *Robidišče – A Village on the Border. Cultural Heritage and Village Identity*. Nova Gorica.
- Nel, Etienne and Stanko Pelc, eds. 2020. Introduction. Social Innovation and Geographical Marginality. In *Responses to Geographical Marginality and Marginalization*, 1–8, 9–20. Springer. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-51342-9>.
- Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia No. 45/98. 1998. *Act on the Reconstruction of Structures after the Earthquake and the Promotion of Development in Posočje*. Ljubljana: Official Gazette.
- Paniagua, Angel. 2017. Spatial and Individual Resistance(s) in Depopulated and Remote Rural Areas. *Space and Polity* 21 (3): 303–317. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2017.1355874>.
- Pelc, Stanko 2017. Marginality and Marginalization. In *Societies, Social Inequalities and Marginalization*, eds. Raghubir Chand, Etienne Nel, and Stanko Pelc, 1–18. Cham: Springer. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50998-3\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-50998-3_2).
- Pelc, Stanko. 2018. Geography of Marginality. *Geografija v šoli* 26 (1): 8–13. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59132/geo/2018/1/8-13>.
- Pervez, Ghauri, Xiaolan Fu, and Amorettya Minayora. 2022. Digital Technology-Based Entrepreneurial Pursuit of the Marginalised Communities. *Journal of International Management* 28 (2). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intman.2022.100948>.
- Razpotnik Visković, Nika and Blaž Komac. 2021. Gastronomy Tourism: A Brief Introduction. *Acta Geographica Slovenica* 61 (1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/AGS.10258>.
- Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés. 2018. The Revenge of the Places That Don't Matter (And What to Do About It). *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 11 (1): 189–209. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsx024>.
- Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés. 2020. The Rise of Populism and the Revenge of the Places That Don't Matter. *LSE Public Policy Review* 1 (1). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31389/lseppr.4>.
- Rodríguez-Pose, Andrés, Javier Terrero-Dávila, and Neil Lee. 2023. Left-Behind Versus Unequal Places: Interpersonal Inequality, Economic Decline and the Rise of Populism in the USA and Europe. *Journal of Economic Geography* 23 (5): 951–977. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbad005>.
- Sampson, Kaylene A., Colin G. Goodrich. 2009. Making Place: Identity Construction and Community Formation through “Sense of Place” in Westland, New Zealand. *Society & Natural Resources* 22 (10): 901–915. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08941920802178172>.



- Sørensen, Jens Fyhn Lykke and Gunnar Lind Haase Svendsen. 2023. What Makes Peripheral Places Matter? Applying the Concept of Political Capital Within a Multiple Capital Framework. *Journal of Rural Studies* 103: 103–136. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2023.103136>.
- SiSTAT. 2024. Population Censuses 1869, 1910, 1991, 2000, 2010, 2020, 2023. URL: <https://pxweb.stat.si/SiStatData/pxweb/sl/Data/-/05C5003S.px> (accessed 17.6.2024).
- Stojanović, Vladimir, Jasmina Đorđević, Lazar Lazić, Igor Stamenković, and Vanja Dragičević. 2014. The Principles of Sustainable Development of Tourism in the Special Nature Reserve »Gornje Podunavlje« and Their Impact on the Local Communities. *Acta Geographica Slovenica* 54 (2): 392–400. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3986/AGS54407>.
- Ščukovt, Andrejka. 2016. Village Life on the Border in the Light of the Settlement and Building Development of Robidišče. *Chronicle: Journal of Slovenian Local History* 64 (2): 247–258.
- Ščukovt, Andrejka. 2019. Robidišče – vas na meji. *Goriški letnik: zbornik Goriškega muzeja* 43. Nova Gorica: Goriški muzej.
- Wright, Patrick. 2002. *The Village that Died for England: The Strange Story of Tyneham*. London: Faber.

### **Revitalizacija Robidišča: premagovanje izzivov in priložnosti obrobnih podeželskih skupnosti**

V članku je obravnavana revitalizacija Robidišča, vasi, ki se je spoprijemala z izrazito depopulacijo in gospodarskim nazadovanjem. Z ohranjanjem kulturne dediščine, trajnostnim turizmom in vključevanjem skupnosti je vas dosegla opazen napredek, vendar ostaja niz izzivov, predvsem pri infrastrukturi in vzdržnem razvoju turizma. V raziskavi je bila opravljena analiza, kako so lokalne pobude in zunanja podpora prispevale k večji povezanosti in odpornosti skupnosti. Posebej so poudarjene strategije, ki bi jih lahko uporabili tudi pri drugih obrobnih podeželskih skupnostih.

Robidišče leži na meji z Italijo in je v 20. stoletju doživelo velike spremembe zaradi geopolitičnih premikov, vključno z izgubo stikov z beneškoslovenskim zaledjem po drugi svetovni vojni. Prekinitev vezi je povzročila gospodarski in socialni razkroj, številni prebivalci so se odločili za izselitev. Do leta 2023 se je število prebivalcev zmanjšalo na samo na 17 oseb, le nekaj jih tam prebiva stalno.

V 90. letih prejšnjega stoletja so se začela prizadevanja za revitalizacijo, spodbudili so jih domačini in prostovoljci. Osrednjega pomena je bila organizacija pobude »Ohranimo Robidišče« leta 1995, katere cilj sta bili obnova zapuščenih hiš in oživitve vasi. Podpora institucij, npr. občine Kobarid, in čezmejni projekti, npr. PHARE-CBC, so pomagali pri ponovni povezavi vasi s turističnimi potmi, kar je na območje pripeljalo nove obiskovalce.

Trajnostni turizem je postal glavni dejavnik revitalizacije, saj so bile nekatere zapuščene stavbe obnovljene in preurejene v turistične nastanitve. Kljub temu pa težave z infrastrukturo – nestabilna oskrba z vodo, pomanjkanje kanalizacijskega sistema in slabo vzdrževanje cest – še vedno niso rešene. Poleg tega je nenadzorovana rast turizma, zlasti med pandemijo covid-19, preobremenila lokalno infrastrukturo, kar je pri prebivalcih povzročilo skrb zaradi čezmernega turizma.

Raziskava prav tako poudarja osrednji pomen krajevne kulturne dediščine pri krepitvi družbene povezanosti in identitete skupnosti. Številni povratniki in njihovi potomci so dejavno sodelovali pri obnovi vasi, denarno in z delom. Razvoj projektov, ki jih vodi skupnost, npr. male kmetije in lokalne turistične pobude, je prispeval k vzdržnejšemu krajevnemu gospodarstvu.

Kljub uspehom ostajajo izzivi. Razvoj so upočasnile zapletene lastniške razmere in nepripravljenost domačinov, da bi nepremičnine prodali novim priseljencem. Nekatera območja so še vedno zaraščena in zanemarjena. Infrastruktura, predvsem digitalna povezljivost in oskrba z vodo, pa zahteva izboljšave za podporo nadaljnji rasti.

Primer Robidišča priča o potencialu revitalizacije podeželja s kombinacijo lokalnih prizadevanj, zunanje podpore in trajnostnega razvoja turizma. Izkušnja vasi ponuja poduke, ki bi jih lahko uporabili v podobnih skupnostih na obrobjih: pomen uravnoteženja gospodarskega razvoja z ohranjanjem kulturnih in naravnih virov ter vrednost sodelovanja skupnosti pri procesih odločanja.