

Comelico staying or leaving

reasons to return to an Alpine valley



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- Alps and population (Viazzo 1998, Bätzing 2002, CIPRA 2007, Dematteis 2010, Corrado 2010, Debarbieux & Camenisch 2011)
- Emigration of the 'mountaineers by birth' causes brain- drain in the alpine valleys
- Despite the continuous depopulation in some Italian valleys of the eastern Alps, there are signs of an opposite tendency: youngsters go back to their valleys after university.

What are the factors influencing young graduates to go back and settle in their valleys of origin after studies?
Why others do not return?

Are local policies in place to encourage repopulation and *brain-gain*?

Brain-drain in the Alps

- Acknowledged as an important element of depopulation
(Alpine Space 2011, PADIMA 2011)
- Caused mainly by
 1. Lack of job opportunities
 2. Difficult accessibility, isolation
 3. Feeling of emptiness, of the « there is nothing here »
(Schmidlin 2007, Reto Soliva 2007, Arge Alp 2009, Prov. Belluno 2005)

In Switzerland, 80% of graduates do not return
BUT
80% would be ready to return (Egger 2003)

Brain-gain



Distance brain-gain

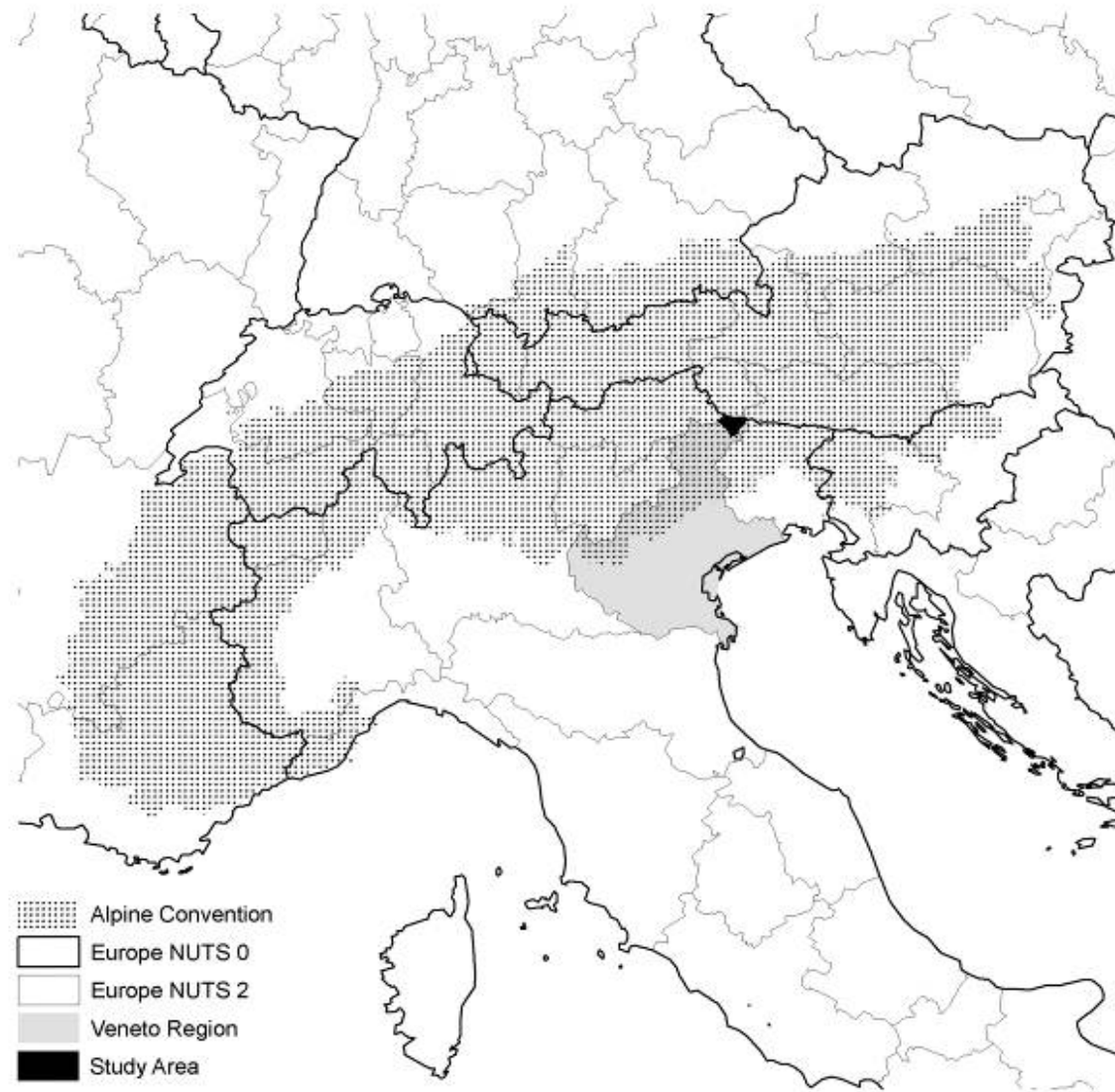
**Graduates do not return
and create networks**
(Bellunoradici, South
Tyroleans Abroad,...)

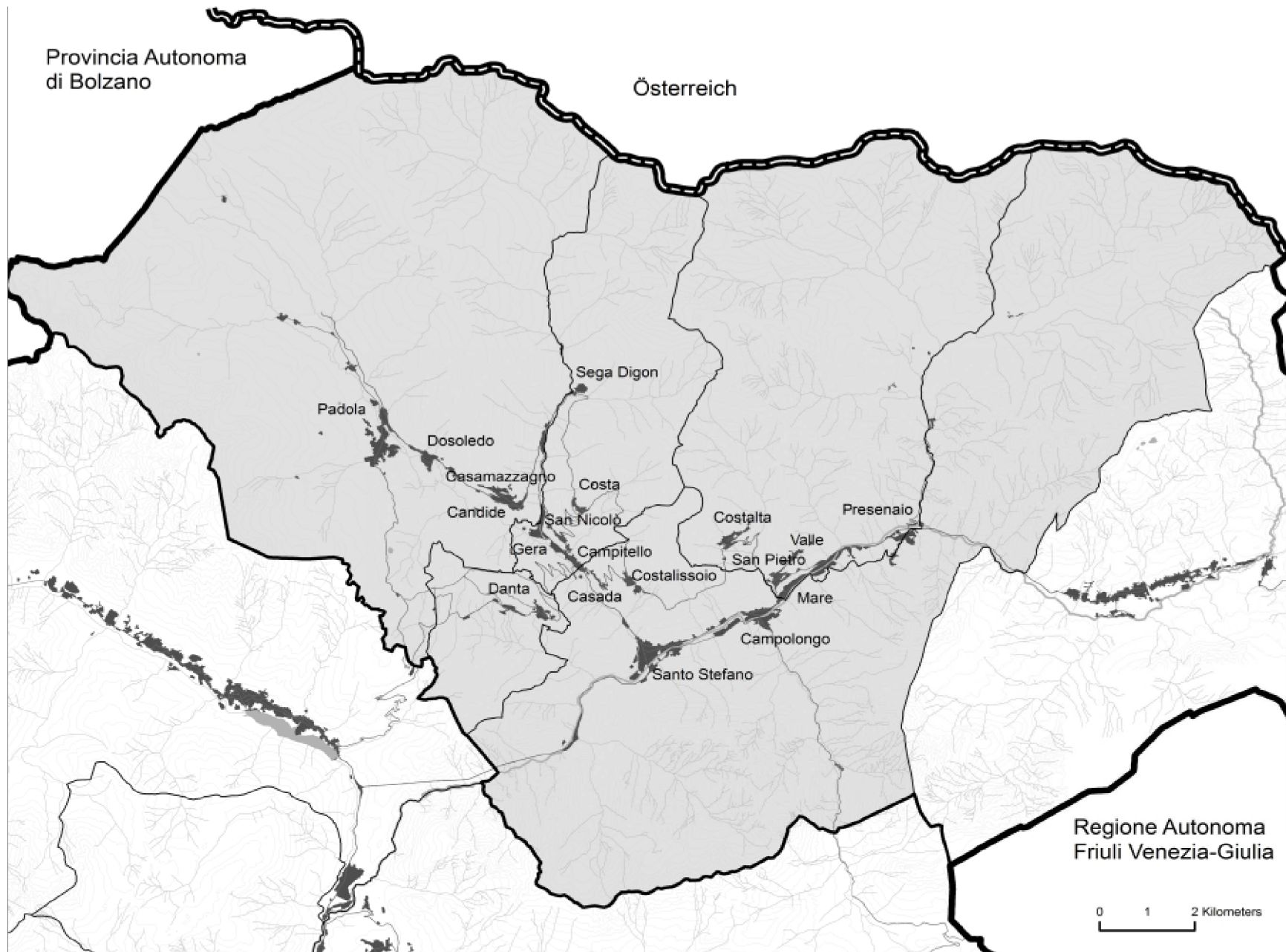
***In loco* brain-gain**

- **New inhabitants ?**
- **Graduates return
to their valleys**

The case study area

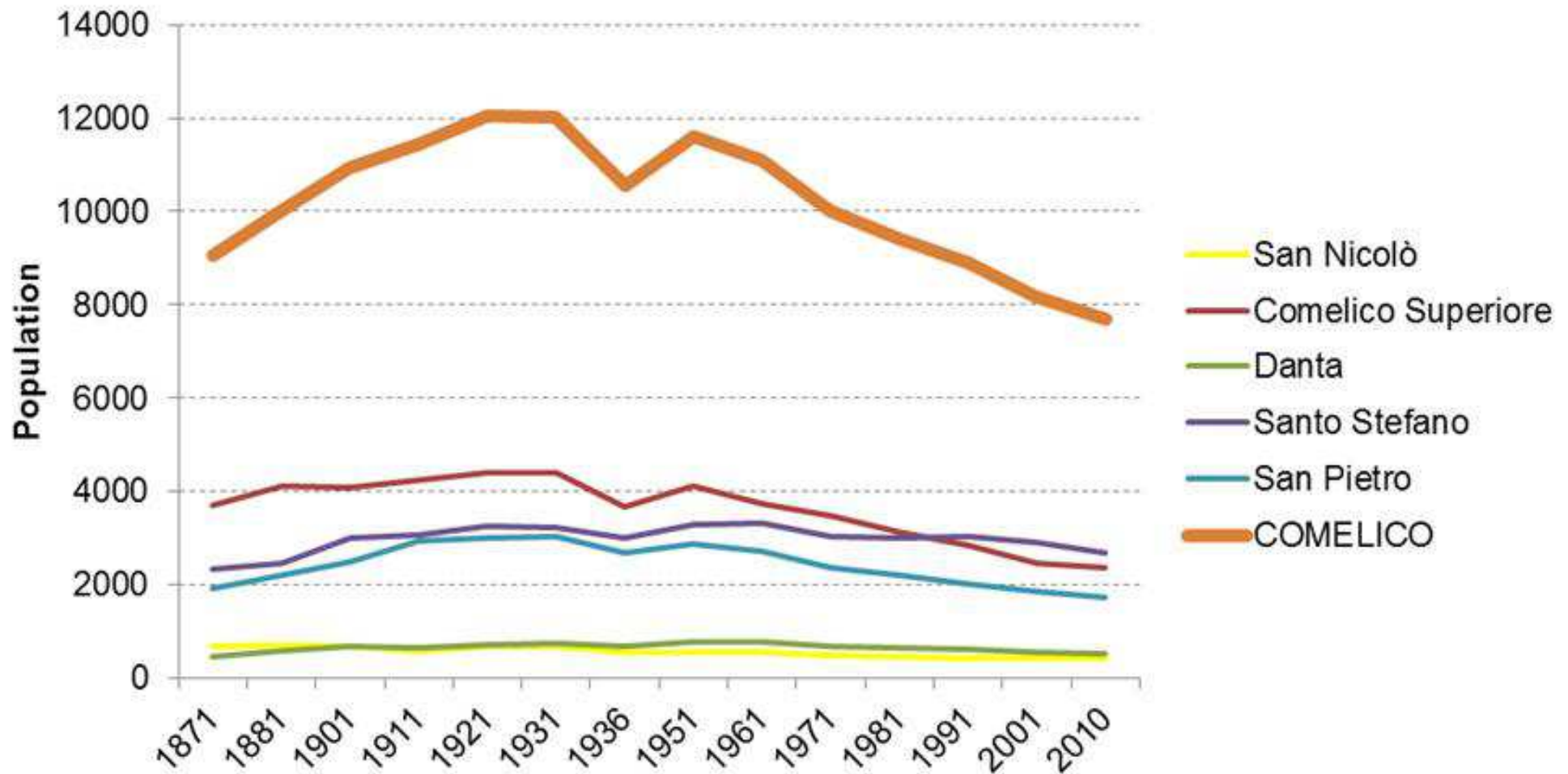
Val Comelico - IT



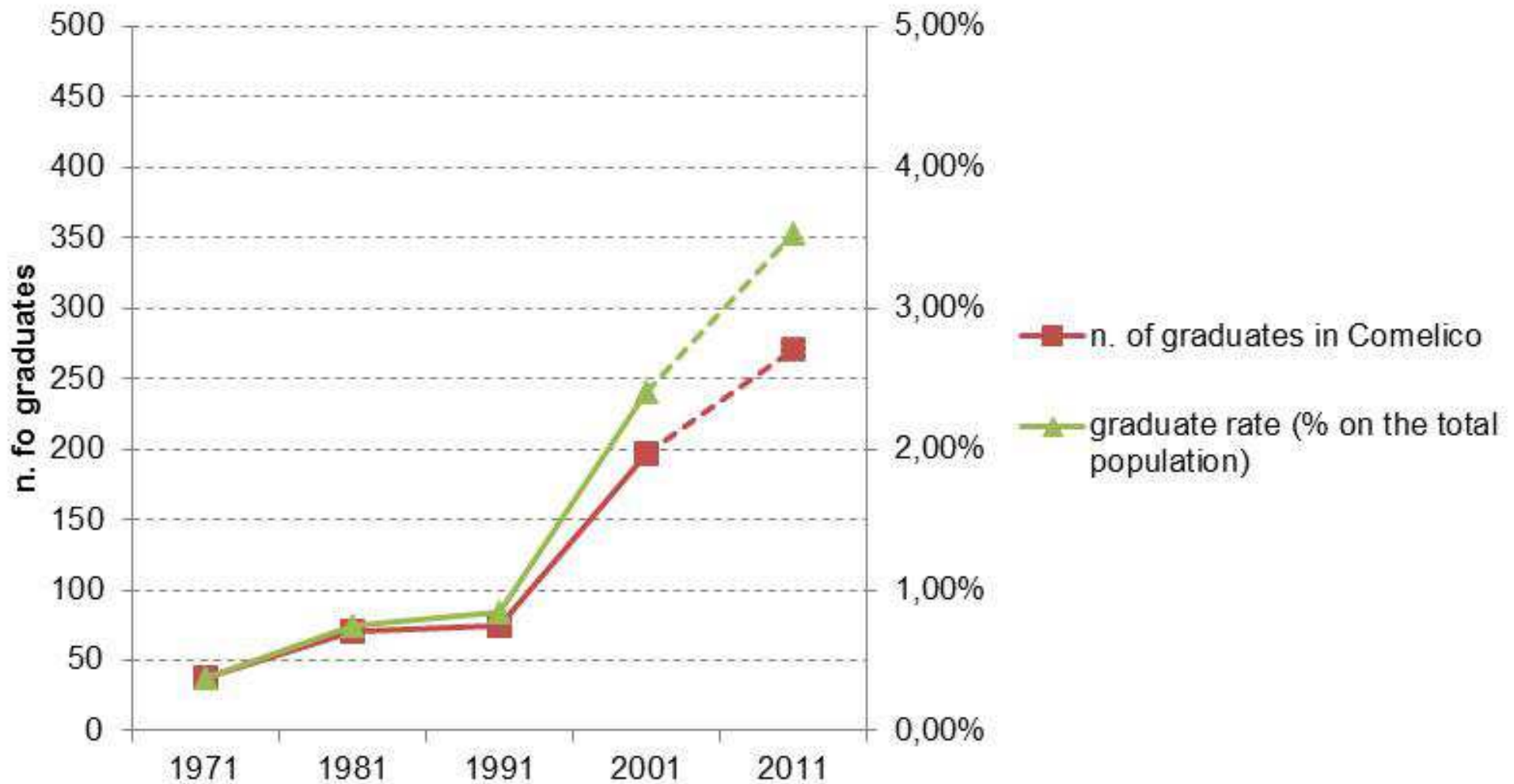




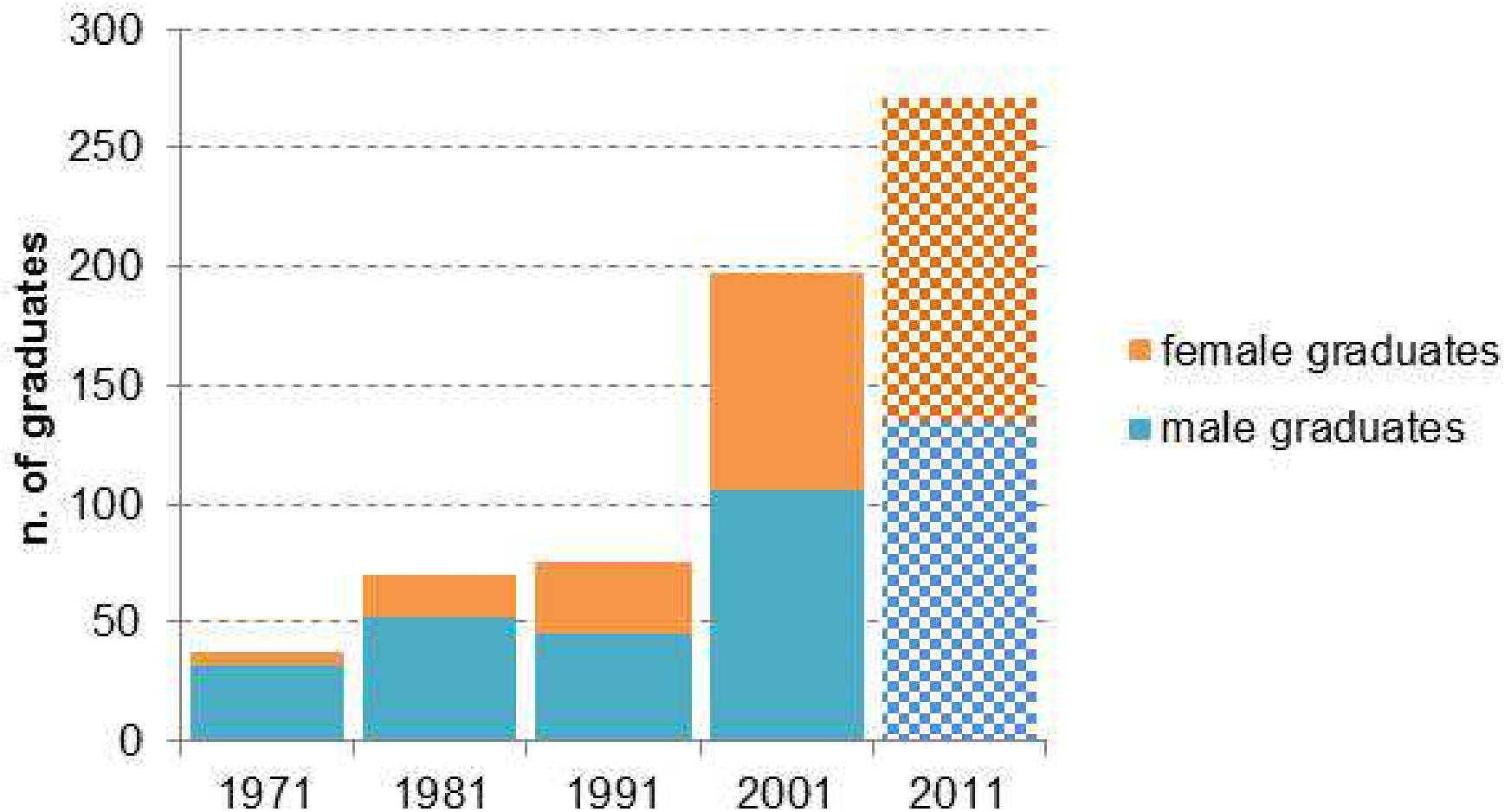
Demographic trend



Graduates in Comelico



Graduates in Comelico – gender perspective



Target groups

1. Non graduates living in Comelico
 2. Graduates not living in Comelico
 3. Graduates living in Comelico
- Born between 1968 and 1988

Methodology

Questionnaire
to all groups
(quantitative approach)

Interviews
to graduates living in Comelico
(qualitative approach)

Interviews
To local policy makers and stakeholders



323 sent questionnaires

207 received questionnaires

Response rate: 62 %



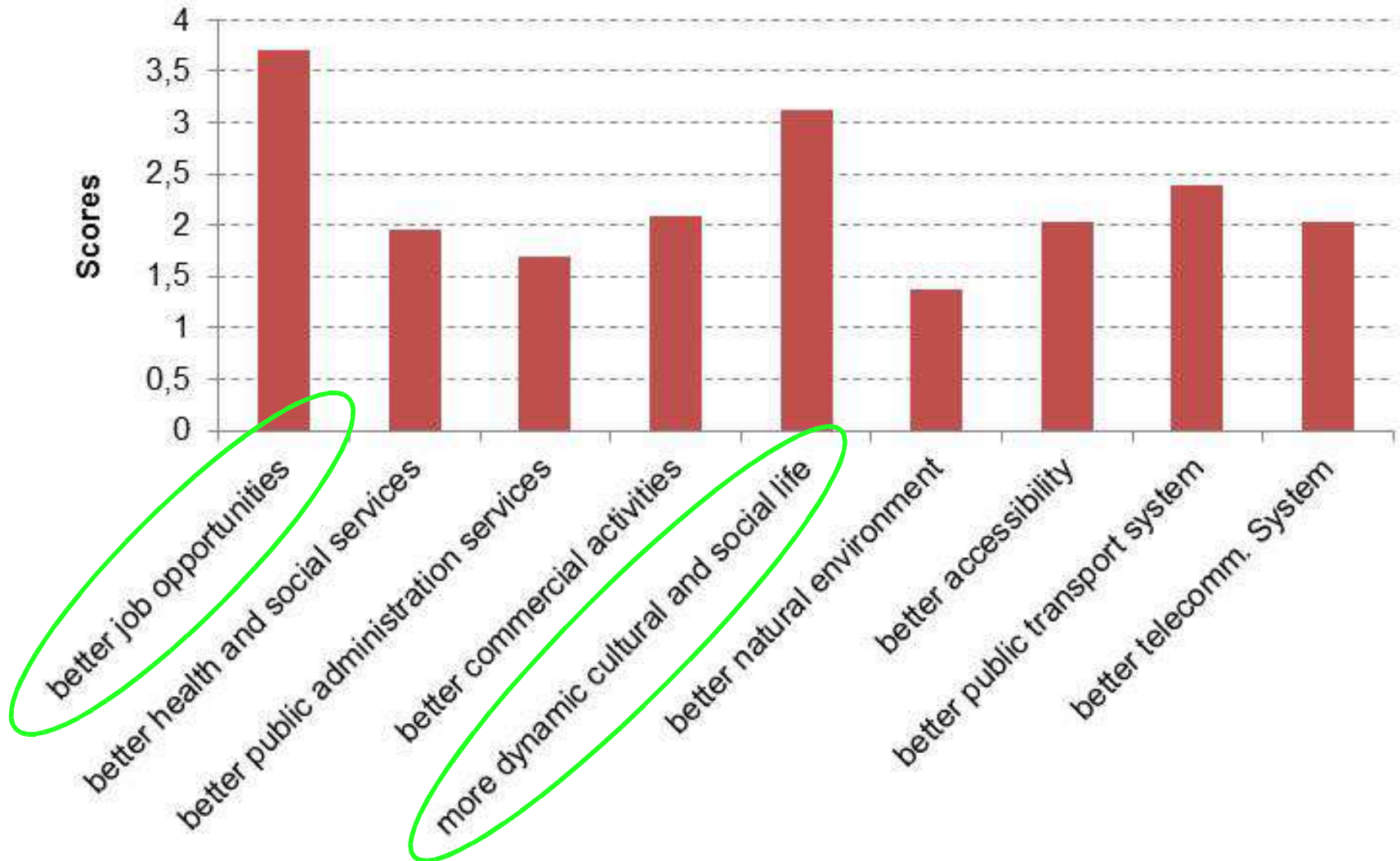


12 interviews to
graduates

8 interviews to mayors
and local stakeholders



Why leaving ? Graduates not living in Comelico

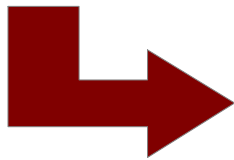


Why leaving? (1)

They search for better job opportunities : 74 %

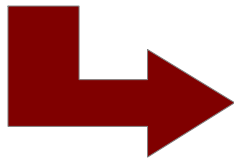
Additional factors

Uninformed pessimism:



72% have never looked for a job in
Comelico and surrounding areas

Demotivating environment:



“What are you still doing here? You will
have to leave at one point, won't you?”

The unavailability of depopulation in the view of the old generations and policy makers

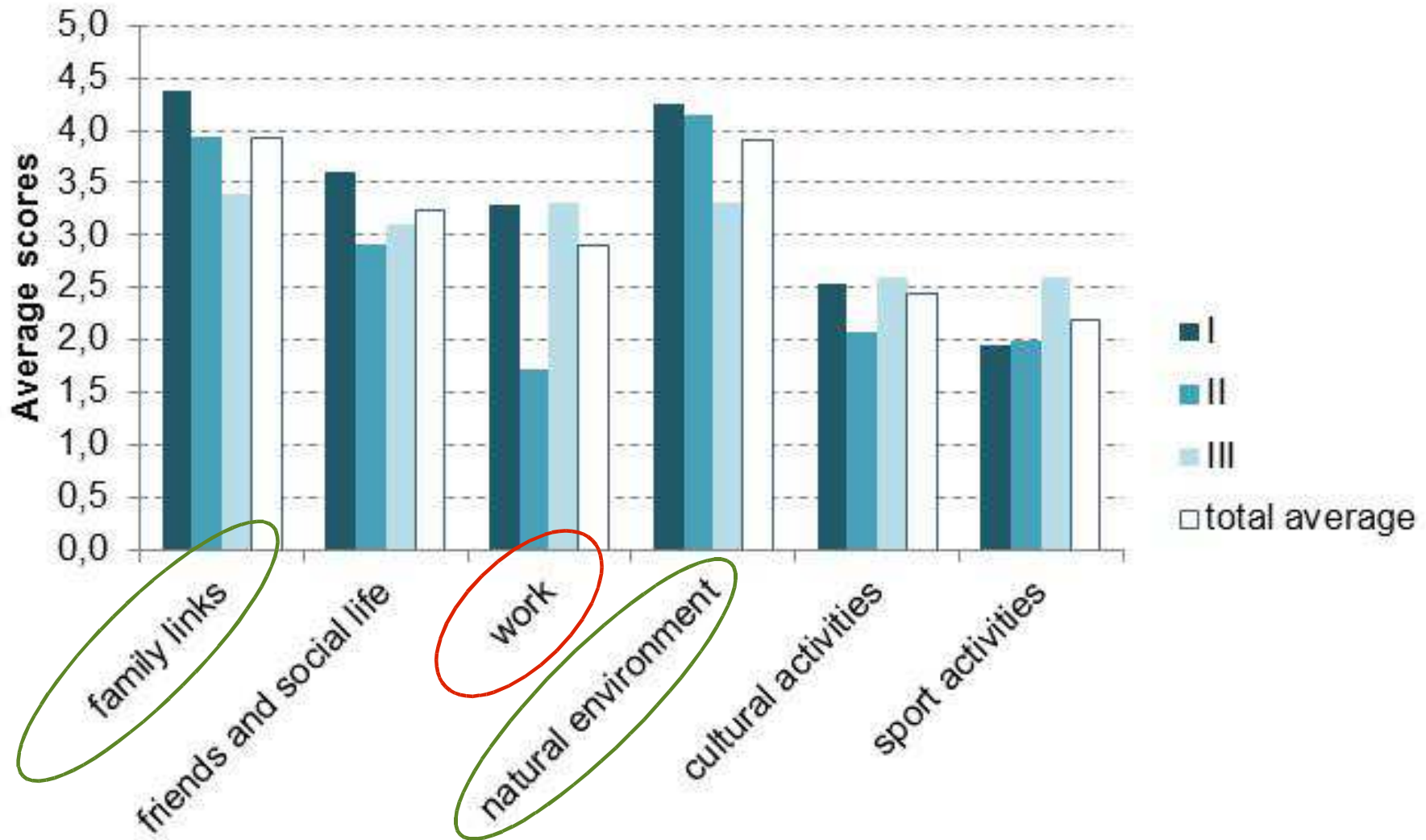
Why leaving? (2)

They search for better *accessibility*
(*vs marginality*)

richer cultural offer
(60%)

**Better transports and
telecommunications**
(40%)

Why returning?



Why returning?

3 dimensions

Job opportunities

Quality of life

Roots

“Job opportunities are the X factor”

“...A job is essential. If there are no [...] opportunities, people do not remain here. [...] and it's difficult to do everything else as well. If someone has got no job, or a job he does not like, then he's got troubles with all the rest [...].”

...and the knowledge of the opportunities on the territory

«... the idea of coming back was strange, I did not see any perspectives. And I did not know anything about the social cooperatives, [...] I was totally unaware when I arrived in the new job, now I realise how much I love it and how much it is stimulating»

Quality of life

The natural environment

“...the bucolic side of things is priceless. I dare anyone in Milan to go out for a walk in the woods after dinner”

Building up a family

“It is so nice to be a child around here. [...] It is a totally different way of living, it's fantastic. Because you open the door and you just go walking. There is no danger”

Absence of dangers

“...People coming from the city are so scared, to leave the car open, hold your bag tight...it is like a lack of freedom that one has. Instead, naively, when I was going out, even in big cities, I was always feeling a lot more free. [...] Being here, gives you a different perspective and makes you feel more free”

Human dimension

“...I am used to go out and greet people, enter a shop to get groceries not just because I need bread, but because I know that I will find someone familiar behind the counter, we chat a bit, I meet one in the street and I say " let's go for a coffee”

House ownership

“...The fact that here in San Nicolò, we had a place we could stay. You have a house here, you give it a second thought before you say, we go renting somewhere else. It's another expense on top of the rest”

Roots and feeling of belonging

«When in Trieste, I loved the city. But when taking the bus back home for the weekend, and arrived in Sappada, every time for all those years I felt the same emotion when seeing the valley opening up. [...] this is not explainable, it is what it is and that's it»

Feeling of belonging

«...here I feel that I am part of something, a group of friends, the family, society...you feel that you are part of a community [...] you know who they are, they know who you are, there is no need to explain everything...when you are out there, you are a number, a shadow passing by...»

Policies for repopulation and *in loco* brain-gain: state of play in Val Comelico

National law : 31/01/1994 n.87 delegates regions to shape policies for mountain areas.

In Veneto region, no specific policy instrument is set up yet



Absence of regional support

Absence of local joint strategic vision and actions

Policies for repopulation and *in loco* brain-gain: perspectives

**Acknowledgement of brain-gain
as a boosting factor for local development**

**JOB
OPPORTUNITIES**

KNOWLEDGE OF THE
TERRITORY
AND
ITS POTENTIALS

QUALITY OF LIFE

ACCESSIBILITY
CULTURE AND SERVICES

**ROOTS
AND
FEELING OF
BELONGING**

**Thank you
for your attention**

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