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DEMOCHANGE – Demographic change in the Alps: Adaptation strategies to spatial planning and regional development

Duration: 1 October 2009 – 30 November 2012 (38 months)

Financing

Funded by the Alpine Space Programme, the EU transnational cooperation programme for the Alps. ERDF funds: €1,903,000



Project starting points

Demographic change is a key challenge in Europe today because it is also a major issue in regional development and spatial planning. In the sensitive Alpine region, which is so special and different from its surrounding metropolitan areas, finding adequate answers to the challenges of demographic change is vital for the survival of its unique settlements, culture and local character, and especially for its people. Accurate spatial planning and regional development require specific in-depth studies in various fields such as migration, the labour market, changes in demand for public services (i.e., healthcare, education and transportation), the cost and quality of housing and so on. The DEMOCHANGE (DC) project addressed these issues not only in a strategic way by developing roadmaps for spatial and regional development, but also in practice by implementing twenty-seven pilot actions.

Project goals

The main DC goal related to the health and spatial planning issues, which are also the focus of the SPHERA project, was to better understand the past, current and future regional and spatial

impacts of demographic change within mountain regions. This goal was followed by specific aims:

- To raise the awareness of the general public and regional stakeholders of demographic change;
- To create an overview of the regional and spatial impact of demographic change in Alpine regions;
- To provide a set of utilities for mobilising and activating stakeholders and decision-makers;
- To develop specific measures adapted to the needs of different model regions;
- To create generalised adaptation strategies, roadmaps and activities for the Alpine region; and
- To create a network to implement pilot actions and strategies in Alpine regions and communities.

Content of work packages

As required by the Alpine Space Programme standard, the first three work packages were devoted to project preparation (WP1), project management (WP2) and information and publicity (WP3). WP4 focused on demographic change analysis with the aim of creating an overview of the regional and spatial impact of demographic change in Al-

pine regions. WP5, entitled “Adaptation process utilities”, concentrated on mobilising and activating the respective stakeholders and decision-makers to start a discussion about demographic change at the regional level. Within WP6, based on the results of the analysis and data collection in WP4, each partner from Austria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland established individual pilot actions in their model regions. WP7 analysed these pilot actions and, also taking into account the results of WP4 and WP5, created generalised adaptation strategies, roadmaps and activities for the Alpine region. The last work package (WP8) was a synthesis of the entire project. The results of the project with a focus on strategies for rural and spatial planning in the Alpine region were disseminated through the final conference, publication of the book *Coping with demographic changes* (Bausch et al., 2014) and other channels.

Project outputs

The outputs of the DC project can be categorised and summarised as follows:

- Recommendations for policy-makers and policy papers:*
 - Demographic change in the Alps: Adaptation strategies to spatial



Figure 1: Identifying measures to activate the elderly in a focus group with the elderly (Bled, Slovenia; photo: Barbara Černič Mali).

planning and regional development, results booklet (Forster, 2012);

- Strategies to cope with demographic change in the Alpine region: Roadmaps for spatial planning and regional development (Maurer et al., 2012);
 - Demographic challenges in the Alpine region: The search for transnational answers (Maurer, 2012).
- b. *Guidelines for practitioners:*
- Public Participation Manual (Müller & Stotten, 2011);
- c. *Tools and decision support systems:*
- SWOTTOOL: Internet tools to do online SWOT analysis on demographic change.
- d. *Studies and analyses:*
- Demographic change in the Alpine region; short regional reports (ten reports).
 - Demographic change in the Alpine region; summary (Marot & Černič, 2011).

Furthermore, with the aims of raising awareness, enabling exchange of knowledge, sharing information about good practice initiatives and fostering cooperation, DC established an expert network of planners, regional developers and decision-makers within Alpine regions.

The results of the DC project are available for download at the project homepage (<http://www.demochange.org>). Within these results, this presentation focuses on the actions and measures presented in the final DC document, entitled “Strategies to cope with demographic change in the Alpine space: Roadmaps for spatial planning and regional development”. It should be pointed out that they are to be regarded as general recommendations that have to be adjusted to relevant national challenges and planning systems, as well as to their inherent differences. Even though demographic changes affect the entire Alpine region, the local representations of this phenomenon are highly heterogeneous and location-specific. For this reason, any ambition to design common strategies for the Alpine region is impeded by diverse planning approaches traditionally used in the Alpine regions, as well as by the various representation of demographically induced problems at the various local levels. Despite these complexities, these recommendations can be used in regional planning and regional development to tackle demographic change (Maurer et al., 2012).

Three general recommendations that relate to the scope of the SPHERA project were highlighted:

1. *Adapting to demographic change as an obligatory target and a priority field of action in regional planning and regional development*

The precondition for implementing this recommendation is that demographic change first be recognised and then formulated as an explicit objective in all regulations and legislative acts in regional planning and development.

2. *Improving utilisation of current demographic monitoring tools and processes*

The demographic data (monitoring, statistics and reports) that are provided by Eurostat and national statistics offices at all levels, including the local one, should be continuously utilised by regional and local managers and authorities to obtain adequate input relevant for adapting local and regional strategies.

3. *Connecting regional development and spatial planning*

The issue of strict institutional separation of spatial planning and regional development was highlighted by experts as an unsustainable separation. The two areas of expertise that are closely related and interdependent are viewed and treated as separate areas of work and expertise, with dissimilar competencies and competence levels in the various countries of the Alpine region. Both areas could be better aligned in terms of definition of objectives, strategy development and implementation of measures through establishing a common platform or through institutionalised regular meetings, hopefully resulting in improved coordination and greater efficiency.

Apart from general recommendations, *specific recommendations* on demographic challenges that should especially be taken into consideration within spatial

planning and regional development strategies were prepared. Those were ordered by the following three topics: 1) children, families and youth, 2) the elderly and 3) migration. The main challenges recognised within the second one (i.e., “Seniors and ongoing aging of society”) were that the over-aging of the population in the Alpine area poses the main challenges, especially in relation to mobility, access to services and provisions for older people. These issues are followed by three objectives that specifically target health and social issues of the changing society. Recommended measures were proposed, along with a proposal for actors that should play the role of leading, moderating and cooperating, with levels (national, regional and local) also suggested.

Objective 1: *Supporting family care better*

- Recommended measure 1.1: *A system of care security and financial assistance for home care* for the elderly and disabled in all Alpine regions could be introduced. Eligibility would depend on individuals' conditions and need for care. The measure could prolong independent living of the elderly within their familiar environment, supported by necessary care.
- Recommended measure 1.2: *Assistance (including financial) as a contribution to families for their efforts in providing care at home for their members in need.* Families taking care of their own family members could be assisted by professional services and care institutions and supported by basic training offers and consultation hours. Similar to the measure above, this would create preconditions for staying at home longer and would at the same time ease the burden currently imposed on families.

Objective 2: *Improving housing, mobility and independent living for elderly people*

- Recommended measure 2.1: *Incentives for constructing sheltered housing and adaptation of owner-occupied homes* with the aim of promoting independent living. The elderly and disabled should be supported in terms of organisation and financing to adapt their homes to specific accessibility and safety needs. Information on favourable financial instruments and reliable contractors for adaptations should be provided to them. In addition, information on other available housing options for the elderly (flat-sharing; inter-generational living, etc.) should be disseminated via info-points.
- Recommended measure 2.2: *Guaranteeing the proximity and availability of services and provisions for the elderly.* Provisions for the elderly often rely on relatives and neighbours. If proximity and availability of services and provisions cannot be guaranteed, basic services could be provided via “call centres” or mobile units (mobile sales points), for example. If the provision of profit-based services is too costly, volunteers could be stimulated, trained and involved. Furthermore, financial incentives for local providers of services that could help maintain a sufficient level of provision could be less costly than public provision of services.
- Recommended measure 2.3: *Setting up day-care centres for elderly people:* Two types or levels of services could be provided: a) assistance for the elderly that are still in good psychological and physical condition and b) day-care for individuals that live with their relatives but cannot live independently while other family members are absent (e.g., due to jobs). The aim

of the services for the first group would be to improve their quality of life, reduce loneliness and reduce the dependency the elderly on their relatives. The services for the second group of users is more demanding due to the need for professional personnel, but overall would still be less costly than institutional care and would reduce the burden of other family members. Such day-care centres could be set up in smaller scale and could, if associated with other public institutions (e.g., preschools or youth centres) share the infrastructure and services, and possibly stimulate intergenerational cooperation.

- Recommended measure 2.4: *Checking demography in all infrastructure planning and construction issues:* In all planning and building projects that have an impact on elderly people there should be an ex-ante demography check in relation to barriers, the proximity of services and supply, public traffic services and so on. This is also in line with the contemporary concept of design for all.

Objective 3: *Improving social integration of elderly people*

- Recommended measure 3.1: *Implementing new activities for elderly people:* active elderly people can offer important support and knowledge-sharing to other elderly people or young people. A council of generations or intergenerational centres could be created with the aim of building a bridge between generations while fostering their participation in social life. The benefits would be multiple: the knowledge and experience of the elderly would be capitalised, the elderly would be protected from social isolation and exchange between young and old would be improved. Furthermore, knowledge and skills of the local elderly could

also be included in local economic activities; for example, guides for history, tradition, crafts and so on.

An important part of the DC results were twenty-seven pilot actions put into practice in the five partner countries. The pilot actions covered a broad range of topics, several of them addressing more than one issue. About a half of all pilot actions focused on society, culture and integration, followed by those on tourism and hospitality, and then those on settlement and housing, on mobility, infrastructure and supply, on health and nursing care, and on the job market and qualifications. All of the pilot actions tried to develop strategies to adapt to demographic change and have implemented measures to cope with challenges of demographic change (Forster, 2012).

Together with nine other ASP projects, the DC project was selected for assessment analysis within WP4 of the SPHERA project. The analysis was performed in order to capitalise on the main achievements of the past projects ASP projects targeting health and spatial planning issues and to identify the most valuable lessons learned from those projects.

Project partners

The project was led by Munich University of Applied Sciences, Department of Tourism (Germany) and involved the following partners from research institutions, universities, regional agencies and municipalities:

- The Regional Government of Salzburg, Department of Spatial Planning (Austria);
- The University of Salzburg, Department of Geography and Geology (Austria);
- The Aosta Valley Autonomous Region, economic and social observatory (Italy);
- The National Union of Mountain Municipalities, Communities and Authorities (UNCEM; Italy);
- The Free University of Bolzano, School of Economics and Management (Italy);
- The Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia (UPIRS; Slovenia);
- The Regional Development Agency for Northwest Upper Carniola (RAGOR; Slovenia);
- The Oberallgäu District (Germany);
- The Garmisch-Partenkirchen District (Germany);
- The Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, School of Social Work (Switzerland);
- The Policy Studies Research Consulting – Interface (Switzerland); and
- The Conference of the Cantons Luzern, Uri, Schwyz, Obwalden, Zug und Nidwalden (Switzerland).

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