

## Spatial planning, health systems and ageing in the Alps

For more than a decade, demographic change has been a prominent theme in European, national and regional policies. Ageing and population decline are the most challenging trends for the future, with critical variations in demographic patterns between the European regions, depending on several socio-economic factors. In addition, demographic trends have effects on the spatial conditions of the EU countries, with peripheral and rural areas as well as post-industrial urban and mountain areas at greater risk of de-population. These demographic trends have important socioeconomic and policy implications due to their impact on the provision of services of general interest, including social and healthcare services, and urban-rural population imbalances. Furthermore, demographic change is exacerbating the processes of societal fragmentation and polarization of urban societies, with growing disparities in terms of social inclusion, economic capacity and service accessibility.

Demographic change is thus a mainstream topic involving various policy areas and levels of intervention, including social and healthcare systems, urban and rural planning, transportation and social infrastructure, economic and competitiveness growth, education, training and social innovation policies. Policy responses to these phenomena call for an interdisciplinary approach and relate to regenerative interventions, investments in infrastructure (transport, ICT and social infrastructure) and providing social services to improve the living conditions and wellbeing of the resident population and the fairest accessibility to services.

This new changing scenario has major policy implications necessitating novel spatial planning approaches that should complement standardised methods of territorial governance with lines of development inspired by innovation. Consequently, providing mobility and ICT-based services, social housing, healthcare for the elderly or community facilities, for example, must incorporate a certain degree of experimentation in order to be tailored to the new social landscape. This requires an effort to promote social innovation for service provision and a strategy to make territorial governance more resilient to the changing scenario.

The EU cohesion policy, within the scope of territorial cooperation, can play an important role in supporting regional adaptation to demographic change and reversing the risks of wider development gaps between regions into new opportunities for growth and inclusiveness. In this direction, the ERDF co-funded the SPHERA project, starting from the results and good practices gathered through experience in the Alpine Space Programme, has investigated possible new ways of combining spatial planning and healthcare policies for boosting wellbeing and inclusive growth into a more proactive approach in demographic policymaking. This path is also intended to offer an opportunity for reflection on mutual institutional learning and setting up a new generation of transnational activities.

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