

# Processes of integration and regional development agency in Austria

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# Introduction

- Social diversity in rural Alpine regions is increasing (ethnic background, languages, educational attainment, religion, reason of coming, etc.)
- Integration and inclusion of incomers is already an important issue in many rural areas – many projects and initiatives on local level
- What is the contribution of regional development agencies?
- Three different approaches presented
  - Leader Development Strategies
  - Culture of Welcoming in Upper Austria
  - Platform of Mayors

# How do Local Development Strategies (LEADER) reflect migration and integration issues

- LEADER has a long history of supporting local and regional development initiatives with the specific task of enhancing innovation and quality of life in rural areas
- LEADER has always addressed aspects of „new“ social groups or „marginal groups“ at times, but efforts often remained scattered or pilot actions with few exceptions
- Strengthening of social and community issues in the current LDS (one of three action areas) pave the way for integration and inclusion issues of rural areas – reaction to ongoing social transformation in rural regions



# How do Local Development strategies (LEADER) reflect migration and integration issues II

- The LEADER projekt database lists 24 projects under the key word „social integration and inclusion“, 2 of them are transnational projects
- Not only projects concerning migrants, refugees or asylum seekers but also other disadvantaged groups, but relevant projects are also „hidden“ behind other key words
- Thus awareness for social diversity including migrants has risen substantially and opportunities for projects have increased

# Culture of welcoming in Upper Austria, contribution to economic stability

- Project of the agency for regional development in Upper Austria
- Starting point: Lack of skilled workers in the region, difficulties to keep them in the regions
- Aim: to develop a culture of welcoming based on professional structures for social integration
- Pilot project started in 2014 with analysis of current situation in two pilot regions, rollout for all 6 development regions 2016-2017
- Important outcome: Attractive jobs and labour market are most important for coming, but frame conditions are also relevant decisions factors to stay

# Culture of welcoming in Upper Austria, contribution to economic stability II

- 9 dimensions of „feeling welcome“:
  - arrival, general welcome
  - support with administrativ regulations,
  - labour market,
  - housing,
  - infrastrucatur and social services
  - familiy
  - education
  - leisure time
  - health
- Innovation workshops on regional level with enterprises, public administration and social communities
- Welcoming check for communities and enterprises (<http://www.willkommen-standortooe.at/>)
- Development of partner systems for better integration



## Platform of mayors for refugee accomodation and integration

- Mayors as central actors in times of a current challenge
- Starting point: in Sept 2015 about 120 mayors gathered at the European Forum Alpbach to search for solutions to the „asylum accomodation crisis“.
- Participative and moderated exchange between mayors and various experts to share information and know how, establish network linkages, show good practices, etc.

# Platform of mayors for refugee accomodation and integration II

- 4 additional meetings with the last one in Sept 2016 focusing on integration processes rather than accomodation issues (all in all 350 mayors)
- Though mayors focussed on their local situation, the regional dimension is inherent:
- Process of accomodation and integration of new arrival has been particularly successfull if mayors could fall back on experiences, knowledge and cooperation of regional actors
- Important to build networks and to learn from others, to cooperate and to coordinate between different stakeholders
- Call for a regional coordinator for refugee issues

# Conclusion – what is the contribution of regional development agencies

- Regional development encompasses multiple aspects of daily life – like integration
- Need of an holistic and integrated approach
- Regional development actors can play an important brokerage role in bringing together different stakeholder groups
- They are often perceived as more neutral compared to NGOs and others with an expressed interest
- Importance of coordination between different levels of governance to prevent communities from being overwhelmed

Thank you for your attention