

Processes of integration and regional development agency in Austria

Salecina 2017

„Foreign immigration in the Alps and the phenomenon of refugees“

Maloja, 11. Mai 2017

Ingrid Machold

Bundesanstalt für Bergbauernfragen, Wien

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 acteurs 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