

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

In a period of spatial uneven development, many mountain regions experience demographic challenges with out-migration of young people, brain drain and ageing population structure. This implies severe negative outcomes not just on socio-economic performance, but also on human-nature relationship. A thorough investigation of spatial developments requires a close, place-sensitive assessment of local and regional changes, strategies and planning efforts to cope with the harmful “downward-spiralling” processes observed in a number of mountain contexts.

This presentation draws from a study for the province of Belluno, Italy, which has been supplemented by observations from policy processes and current activities in the Austrian mountain region of East-Tyrol. The province includes an active LEADER region, the LAG Alto Bellunese, which is characterised by complex demographic, economic, environmental and cultural dynamics. Here, the on-going, predominantly urban-centred regional development approaches generate dependence, aggravating perceptions of remoteness and marginalization. However, as is explored in recently emerging discussions, the conditions of lagging behind also offers the opportunity to experiment different local action approaches, oriented at a new balance between humans and nature.

The revitalisation of this mountain region depends on effective regional strategies. Therefore, the presentation will report results from the survey of other Alpine contexts where innovative practices have already been experimented. These summary findings can provide useful hints for rethinking local governance approaches and show conclusions for planning new strategies aiming at guaranteeing the safeguard of ecosystem services, the protection and valorisation of the territory and the preservation of the local intangible heritage in the study area. The rationale for changing the scope of regional activities was inspired by analysis from the regional development actors and LEADER implementation in Eastern Tyrol.

This enabled to outline possible strategies for new sustainable development pathways for the area of Belluno Dolomites. In this adaptation adequate levels of governance have to be addressed that can successfully drive European and national resources. Moreover, a cross-sectoral reorganisation of the settlement system, welfare approaches and governance system are esteemed crucial to support the functional, cultural and economic interdependencies at the supra-municipal level. Such changes are very challenging and need a ‘cultural transformation’ to enhance local participation, collaboration and cooperation in a long-term vision, thus triggering the co-design of new boundaries and levels of governance.