

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Despite the predominant movements of in-migrants towards agglomerations over the last three decades the number of international migrants to remote and particularly mountain areas has steadily increased throughout European mountain regions. As a general phenomenon this has been addressed as „new immigration destinations“ that extend to various, previously neglected areas. As such, this migration type might be perceived as an emerging driver for spatial cohesion aspects. However, migration does not only play a key role in stabilising and reversing adverse demographic trends in remote locations, but also holds great potential for acknowledging social diversity, cultural exchange and social innovation.

This presentation synthesizes findings from one of the case studies of the H2020 MATILDE research project, i.e. the study area of Vorarlberg in Austria. Situated in the central part of the Alps this region is a place of encounter of different population movements since long. In the case study, the current processes of social integration of refugees are analysed within three local remote municipalities of different size and social characteristics. Based on the conceptual reflection of the work by Ager and Strang (2008) the paper focuses on the effects of newcomers on social cohesion and local development. These are explored for various areas of integration (housing, employment, education, health), but also extend to issues of recognition of personal contributions and esteem.

The paper analyses the potential of various activities developed by enterprises, communities and local social groups to nurture effective social integration processes at local level. Based on qualitative interviews and focus groups with 35 local actors (including 5 small and medium enterprises, local stakeholders and volunteers) and interviews with 25 refugees involving „social mapping“ activities. This becomes instructive for deriving a set of obstacles and good practice examples of integration processes in remote mountain contexts. It appears particularly important to tackle polarization trends in society, to engage in constructing „social bridges“, to enhance practical action and learning of both migrants and locals, and to overcome administrative burden often attached to integration processes of refugees.