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## Added value from European Territorial Co-operation: the impact of demographic change in the Alps on the young

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**Abstract.** The article sets demographic change in the Alps in the framework of European Territorial Cooperation programs. A statistical overview of selected regions in five Alpine countries serves as a basis for further policy analysis. The latter was undertaken to reveal how transnational projects tackle youth issues, including the difficulties within the labour and real estate markets that appeared to be the most problematic factors influencing (out) migration of the youth. While there is only a minor recognition of the young in current policymaking on supranational, regional and local levels, the analysis showed that the added value of transnational programs for mountain regions and localities can be recognized in the development of multi-stakeholder environments, creating and transferring new solutions for the labour market as well as empowering youth participation in policy processes. However, the extent to which these solutions might contribute to overcoming the challenges of demographic change because of transnational programs is limited by various factors. Among these are the precise governance framework, administrative capacity, and population figures.

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## 1. Introduction

One of the greatest challenges of European society is certainly demographic change. This phenomenon has been observed in many European countries; it includes processes such as changing life style, population ageing and changed migration patterns (Surkyn, Lesthaeghe, 2004; Finney, Simpson, 2009; Thornton, Philipov, 2009; European Commission, 2010). Outward migration has been especially apparent in Central and Eastern member states which have also been affected by low fertility with consequent negative natural growth as in the case in Germany. These changes that first started in Western countries have been recognised by theorists as a 'second demographic transition' (SDT) characterised by major changes in family organisation (single parenting, cohabiting, extramarital births etc.) (Lesthaeghe, 2010; Sobotka, 2011; Sobotka et al., 2011). Though for long the impacts of SDT were not recognisable in the Alps or the similar Pyrenees (Lesthaeghe, 2010), the political shift in the 90's significantly changed that. What were before communist countries with their specific set of values, e.g. Slovenia or Eastern Germany, then needed to face new circumstances - a market-led economy - that have slowly started to penetrate into family life styles and the planning of children (Thornton, Phillipov, 2009; Billingsley, 2010). Furthermore, traditionally family-oriented societies, like the Italian have been influenced; for instance information from the census in 2000 shows cohabitation has been especially widespread in many northern Italian areas that reach into the Alps. In comparison to 'lowland Europe', the Alps are a special territorial unit that represents the crossroads of different European cultures: Latin, Germanic, Slavic and other ethnic groups that have significantly shaped the area throughout its history. Although the Alpine identity represents the major 'glue' of the region, the geographical characteristics and differences between political frameworks have caused heterogenic demographic development.

The Alps are a European macro-region but at the same time are one of the least populated areas in Europe with a population density of 73 people/km<sup>2</sup>. Around 14 million people live in an area of 190,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Although classified as a macro-region, it differs from others in Europe due to smaller figures of transnational or functional city regions (ESPON, 2009), and thus it could be classified as functionally deprived (Bätzing, 2003). Although, politically and identity-wise significantly influenced by the mountain range of the Alps, the most obvious characteristic of the Alpine region is heterogeneity. This is apparent also in life styles and family system bonds: while Italy is known for strong family ties, Germany and France are not, Slovenia and Austria are in between (Billari, 2004). There are also differing patterns concerning women leaving their jobs to devote themselves to raising children (European Commission, 2010). The latter confirms that the Alps, not only in the past but also nowadays present a mixture of cultures and population groups with different religious and political backgrounds. While in the past, many tribes passed and/or settled in the area, living peacefully in physically separated valleys, today's globalisation has disturbed this tranquillity.

Due to its geographical characteristics, the area has been significantly influenced by recent global economic turmoil as well as an intensified urbanization process. This process shifted the uniqueness of Alpine territory more towards that of rural-urban continuum regions elsewhere and the migration between the mountain areas and adjacent metropolitan zones has increased (Torricelli, 2003; Husa et al., 2006; Lesthaeghe, 2010; Simonic, 2013). However, as an opposite trend the resettlement of villages abandoned after the Second World War has been noticed in the Alpine border area between Italy and Slovenia (Steinicke et al., 2012). These changes are evident in demographic developments in the region that are no different from general European trends, for example youth migration from rural areas to nearby towns, immigrants from the South

East and Asian countries moving into Alpine cities, a decreasing birth rate and the overall ageing of the society (Birmingham, 2001; Tappeiner et al., 2008a; Gloersen et al., 2012b; Lange, Kurek, 2012). While the elderly population has been widely addressed through measures pertaining to longevity and service provision, young people have mostly been neglected by researchers even though they are equally affected by these social challenges. Since the 1980s, migration has been recognised as one of the main drivers of population change in the Alpine area (Kariel, Kariel, 1982; Messerli, 1987; Permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention [Permanent Secretariat], 1999, 2007, 2012; Marot, Černič Mali, 2014) but not to the same extent everywhere. While the majority of migrations are forced by lack of work and low pay (Biegańska, Szymańska, 2013), the young find the reasons for the mobility are also found in curiosity, a desire to learn and live in other places or as described in Haukanes' research: 'a life-style factor - an urge for coolness and transformation of identity through participation in cosmopolitan youth culture' (2013: 203). As such, the young have been the most exposed and mobile social group, thereby directly impacting on the age structure of the resident population (Tappeiner et al., 2008b). Jones (1999) has argued that the young in rural and mountain areas grow up with the presumption they will soon have to leave to find jobs or higher education. Further, their out-migration from rural Alpine areas is considered problematic since they are a social group with a strongly developed identity crucial for the empowerment, preservation and vitality of the Alpine region (Muir, 2003; Perlik, Messerli, 2004; Kianicka et al., 2006; CIPRA, 2013c). The Alpine identity has been a thread in an otherwise very diverse area in which different tribes had settled in the past and lived isolated from the neighbours.

The Alpine region has only gained political attention in recent decades (Debarbieux, 2009) which is evident by the signing of the Alpine Convention in 1995, the establishment of a separate EU transnational program of territorial co-operation including the Alpine Space Program. However, political recognition is not as convincingly declared for Alpine youth, as illustrated by Del Biaggio's (2011, 2015) research – on the networking of local actors to develop the Alpine region – in which the young were

not mentioned as relevant actor. One positive example of youth integration has been the establishment of the Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention in which, once annually, young people express their opinions and ideas about the future of the Alps. On a European level, the young are addressed by their own program and strategy - the EU Youth Strategy 2010-18 (Commission of the European Communities [CEC], 2009) which aims to provide equal opportunities for young people in education and the labour market, and encourages them to be active members of society. However, this strategy is not territorially specific and its measures do not incorporate the specifics of individual regions. More focused are the individual projects of the European Territorial Co-operation programs. The projects in these programs function on the basis of a softer approach to regional planning including cross-border co-operation providing a variety of environments and opportunities for exchange (Cotella et al., 2012).

Participation in one such project, namely, DEMOCHANGE – Demographic change in the Alps, adaptation strategies to spatial planning and regional development, provided an opportunity to get a better insight into youth issues in relation to regional and spatial planning in mountainous areas; the topic this article is addressing. The young are examined as important social capital for the Alps and should be considered as such. The introduction to the topic is facilitated with basic statistical analyses and includes a more thorough qualitative approach. As a result, special focus is given to the job market and housing issues which further impact on youth demographics. In this regard, EU and national policies have been investigated to bring out their input for solving the problem as well as EU-financed projects which focus on the young and their welfare. The article finishes with policy guidelines and suggestions of measures aimed at reducing the progressive trend in youth depopulation in the region in order to maintain settlements and the landscape, important carriers of Alpine identity.

## 2. Methodology

The research was structured in multiple steps. The situation of young people in the Alpine region

is represented through quantitative and qualitative analyses undertaken within the scope of DEMO-CHANGE. A mixed approach has been selected to benefit from both qualitative and quantitative methods. This approach is already common in research on demographic phenomena, for example, in Jones (1999) and Kiacnicka et al. (2006). Such an approach balances the efficiency of data collection on the basis of quantitative analysis, with the range and in-depth information collected through qualitative techniques. Furthermore, qualitative methods cover for weaknesses in the quantitative information including 'dryness' by providing contextual information necessary for understanding of the phenomena (ACET, 2013; Creswell, 2013).

The 'young' have been defined to include a broader age range of 15 to 30 years, covering both adolescents and active job seekers, on the basis of a sociological definition of youth (Nastran Ule, 1996), the statistical definition of the National Statistical Office (14-29 years; Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia [SORS], 2011) and the EU Youth in Action Program (13-30 years, CEC, 2012b).

While the quantitative part is represented by numerical data collection and simple statistical analysis, as explained later, qualitative research consists of focus groups and document analysis (data on projects, policy documents). Focus groups represent a consultancy technique - a so-called group interview - engaging those with a common interest who discuss a selected topic (Krueger, Casey, 2014; Stewart, Shamdasani, 2014). Primarily, focus groups are used

in marketing to check responses to products about to be launched; here, we have used them to gather additional information on demographic change and a shift in values, to expose major development problems connected to demographic change and spatial planning. A similar use of focus groups for measuring the effect of demographic change has been already recorded (Bollini et al., 2007). We have targeted four groups which are in different ways and scope affected by demographic change; apart from the young, focus groups with the elderly, spatial planners and tourism workers have been set up to provide complementary perspectives (Marot, 2011). Focus groups were run in February and April 2011 in selected municipalities of the Gorenjska region: altogether 29 people participated of whom 8 were elderly, 11 young, 5 were tourism workers and 5 spatial planners. The group interviews usually took from 90 minutes to two and half hours and were structured around 11 questions. The questions were adapted to the theme of the group and language was accommodated to the age of the participants. Some of the questions were supported by graphic material to spur the discussion. With small variations, the following topics were covered by each focus group: introduction of participants, perception of demographic change and its description, quality of life, impacts of demographic change in the territory and in spatial planning, job market, housing policy and potential improvement measures. Examples of questions, sorted by their type, can be seen in Table 1. The interviews have been transcribed and analysed.

**Table 1.** Examples of questions as included in the protocol for the focus group including the young

| Type of questions      | Examples of questions  |
|------------------------|--|
| An opening question    | We kindly ask you to introduce yourself. <b>Please, state the town you come from, what you study/do currently and what are your favourite leisure activities?</b>  |
| Introductory questions | We have prepared a few photos that illustrate life now and in the past. <b>In your opinion how did the young live fifty years ago and how do live they now?</b>  |
| Transitional questions | Can you compare the quality of life in your home town region? Which services do you miss the most in your home town? What do you like the most?  |
| Key questions          | On the charts you can see the major demographic indicators, e.g. natural population growth and population change. <b>How do the demographic changes resonate here? What consequences do these changes have for the infrastructure and general service provision?</b> Is the impact different in urban/rural areas? |
| Concluding questions   | The experts have two views on demographic change: pessimistic (more people, less economic activity, depopulation) and optimistic (less people means more space and less pollution, no traffic jams). <b>Which of the above views is closer to your personal opinion?</b>   |

Source: Černič Mali, Marot, 2011



ognised by the Alpine Convention (Permanent Secretariat, 2007) for the Alps area, for which a common denominator is heterogeneity. The regions are heterogenic in size (108 to 5,420 km<sup>2</sup>), population (7,177 to 467,969), density (28 to 73 people per km<sup>2</sup>), number of municipalities included (4 to 74), and above all, landscape duality where a single unit is evident between the densely populated valley floors and scarcely populated remote mountainous areas. A relevant aspect for policy comparison and decision-making processes are the differences in the organization of governance which can also limit comparability between the data-collecting countries. The regional administrative level is not present in all Alpine countries; there are differences in the management of local planning and the variety of networks in which actors participate. Land use comparison distinguishes the regions with a greater share of agricultural land (40% and more: German Allgäu, Italian Langa Astigiana, and Swiss Nidwalden and Seetal) and those devoting up to 15% of land to agriculture, like Slovenian and Austrian regions. The gross domestic product of the regions varies from the lowest region, in Italy (18,614 EUR per capita in 2008) to the highest, in Switzerland (45,708 EUR per capita in 2009).

To evaluate the added value of the European Territorial Cooperation program, an insight into EU and regional specific policies was necessary to reveal how the issue of young people is integrated into relevant policy documents, e.g., Europe 2020 Strategy (CEC, 2012a), Territorial Agenda 2020 (Informal Ministerial Meeting, 2011), 'Alpine Convention' (Permanent Secretariat, 1995), 'Operational Program for Alpine Space' (Joint Technical Secretariat [JTS], Alpine Space, 2008), national spatial planning or development policies, regional development programs and local plans. In total, 82 documents were reviewed, of which, 18 were EU-wide documents, and 64 were obtained from Austria, Germany, Italy, Slovenia and Switzerland. First, the policy framework has been scanned for the occurrence of keywords linked to demographic change and population (including 'child', 'young', 'youth' and 'family') were important to show the occurrence of youth issues in the reviewed documents (see Maurer *et al.*, 2012). Second, the research focused on relevant transnational projects addressing the consequences of demographic change on the young. This overview

was carried out to detect the types of measures introduced and/or applied by these projects, and their correspondence with the needs of Alpine-specific young people. It helped answer questions concerning the measures that should be introduced by regions in order to improve the quality of life of the young in the Alps and to further utilize their potential.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. The demographic situation of the young in the Alpine area

Diversity is a common denominator in the demography of selected regions. The statistics gathered from Eurostat on the basis of NUTS3/NUTS2 regions show that Alpine population figures have remained constant in recent decades, although the population structure has been significantly reshaped by migration flows (Černič Mali, Marot, 2011; see Fig. 2). Similarly, in the 'Alpine Convention' (1999) a comparison of data for the periods 1970-79 and 1980-89 show an increase in net migration (out of total population change) from 57% to 80%. Major population flows can be observed from rural, usually remote and structurally weak agricultural areas (regions with population decline), to populated valleys and urbanized regional centres (Gloersen *et al.*, 2012a; JTS, Central Europe, 2012; Eurostat, 2013). The rural outflow to urban centres is in line with findings by Perlik (2001) that 66% of all jobs are concentrated on 27% of the urbanized Alpine area. The investigated regions also illustrate variety in population change, typical for the Alps: the population has been stable in the German, Swiss, and two Italian regions (Aosta and South Tyrol) but has been decreasing in both Slovenian regions as well as one Italian in the period from the mid-1990s onwards.

Moreover, the Alpine regions are gaining population from non-EU countries (Middle-East and Asian); thus, a population increase of up to 5% has occurred in regions such as Southern Germany, Northern Italy and Austria. However, Coleman & Salt (1992) point out that such population inflows can often mask out-migration of the young since they are amongst the most mobile and flexible

population groups in terms of settlement (Tappeiner et al., 2008a). According to Bauman (1995) or Easthope and Gabriel (2008), out-migration of the

young is even expected to break the bounds with the original communities in order to realise genuine human potential in other than original communities.

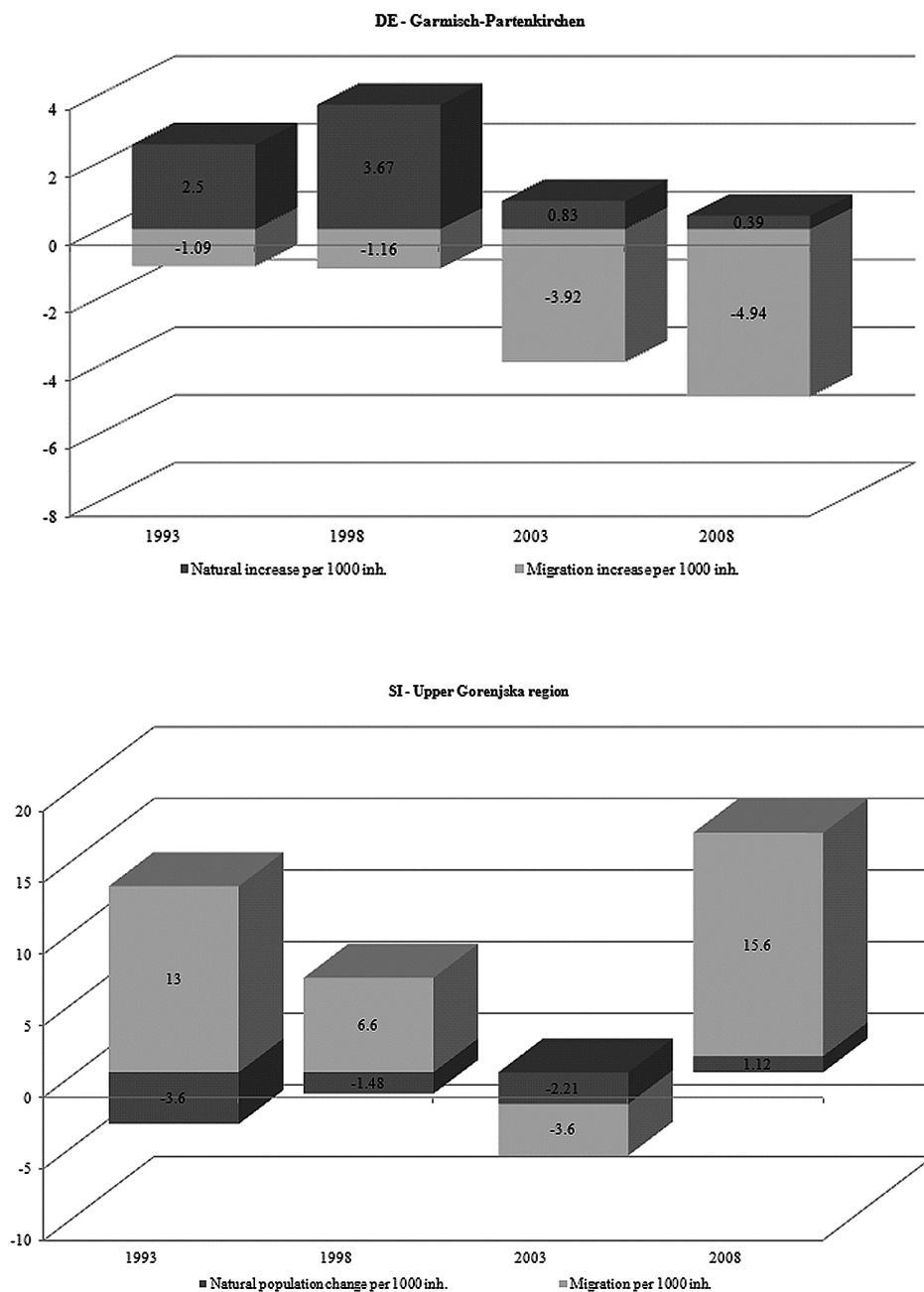


Fig. 2(a), Fig. 2(b). Natural and migration change per 1000 population in the German region Garmisch-Partenkirchen and in the Slovenian Upper Gorenjska region for the period 1993-2008

Source: Černič Mali, Marot, 2011

*Age structure* is one of the most common indicators of the situation of the Alpine young, and has changed significantly in most of Alpine regions since the early 1980s. The proportion of the 0-14 age group has declined to 30% or less in the period from the mid-1990s to the present; only in the Italian region, Aosta, did the population grow by 11% (see Fig. 3). Contrary to the loss of the young, most regions face an increase in the 65+ group propelled by an increase in life expectancy.

The situation of the young in relation to the elderly and in terms of the labour market can best be illustrated by the *old-age dependency ratio* [OADR] which is defined as the ratio between the actual and projected number of the elderly (aged 65 and over) and the number of those of working age (15 to 64 years old). The selected regions have indicator values between 20 and 25%, and especially high scores were noted in Italy’s Langa Astigiana (51%) and Germany’s Garmisch-Partenkirchen (37%). This corresponds to the common picture in the Alpine area where a distinction between the ‘aged countries’ of Europe, such as Italy and Germany with around 20% of total population aged 65 and over, medium values in Austria, France and Switzerland with 16 or 17% and values lower than the EU-27 average (Permanent Secretariat, 2011).

The young directly impact on the reproduction rate of a country. The natural growth rate is positive in seven out of ten regions, with the highest rate in Italy’s South Tyrol (7 / 1000) and Slovenia’s Škofja Loka Hills (5 / 1000) while in others negative trends occur. This is another proof that the demographic situation cannot be generalized for the whole Alpine area. Similar to negative natural growth, the fertility rate (data could be obtained from only some of the studied regions), the average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime, has dropped significantly to an average of 1.4 (the national average for Germany, Italy and Austria). The highest score appears to be in Slovenia (1.6 in 2011) and Switzerland (1.5; Eurostat, 2013). In comparison with older data from the 1960s, the figure has dropped to around one child per woman, e.g., in Austria from 2.7 to 1.4. This might be the result of longer periods in formal education, lack of access to housing, higher working aspirations, etc. A more ‘favourable’ situation is found in some of the Italian regions, e.g., South Tyrol, as a result of younger migrant mothers (under the age of 30 vs. Italian women between 30 and 39) who have more than the average number of children, the so-called ‘juvenescent effect’ (Marot, Černič Mali, 2014).

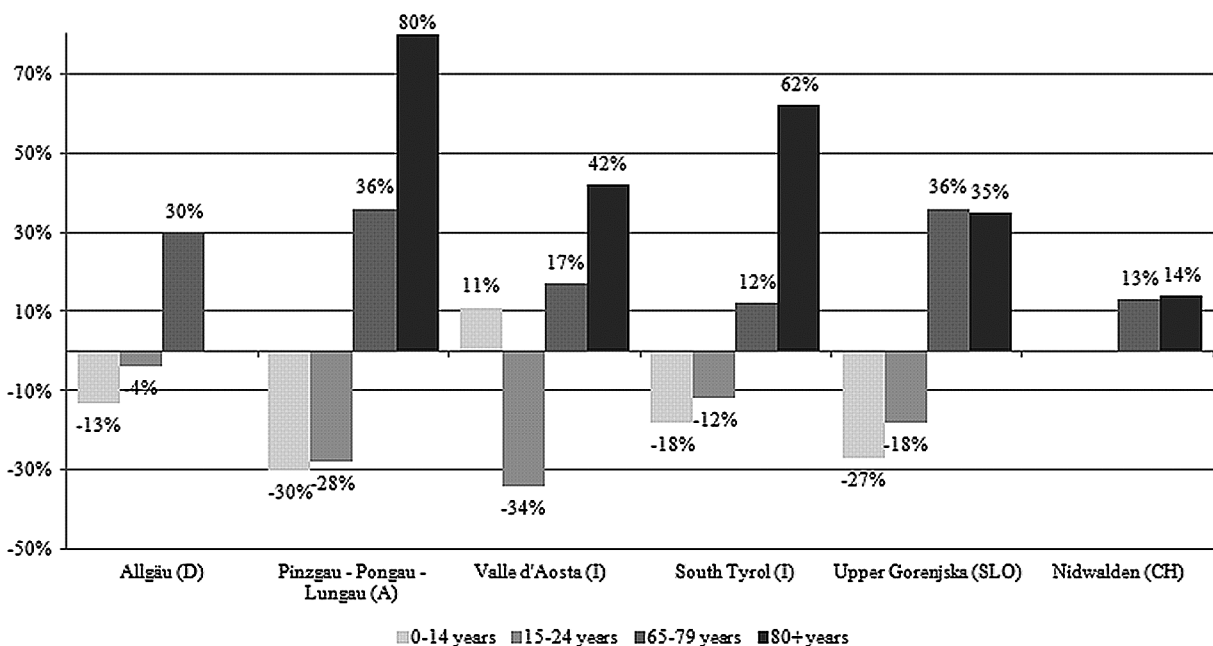


Fig. 3. Population in selected regions, change in population by age group for the 15-year period (1993-2008 or 1994-2009)

Source: Černič Mali, Marot, 2011



*Household size* in the Alps, like in other developed countries (Rychtaříková, Akkerman, 2003; CEC, 2011), has changed towards an increasing number of smaller households, including 'youth households' (students and/or young adults living alone). In the period 1971 to 2001, the number of single households increased by 40% (in Germany's Allgäu), accounting for the highest number and smallest average size. The size of the family has been shrinking because of downward trends in marriage and upward trends divorce, increased life expectancy (one could also speculate a small percentage of registered secondary homes; Ewers, 2005; Steinführer, Haase, 2007; Heiland et al., 2009; Hochschule Muenchen, 2012; Schuler, Dessemontet, 2013). Such changes affect single, elderly households in rural areas, such as in Slovenia, especially with a high share of elderly property owners who struggle to maintain their property and standard of living. In some regions, a larger household size than the national average was detected (2.7 for South Tyrol vs. 2.4 for Italy), which could be explained by traditionally larger families in rural areas (Černič Mali, Marot, 2011).

According to projections, negative demographic trends can be expected in the Alps in the future since the death rate exceeds the birth rate in more than two-thirds of Alpine municipalities (Tappeiner et al., 2008b). Moreover, a negative population trend is expected in German, Slovenian and some Italian regions since many women will leave child-bearing age after the current baby boom period. Projections are positive in the case of Italian and Swiss regions. A sharp decrease in young people is expected, an upward shift in the age of the working population, as well as an increase in the legitimate retirement age.

### 3.2. Housing and labour market problems for the young

Based on results reported by Černič Mali and Marot (2011), the two main problems which spur the out-migration for the Alpine young are the lack of employment opportunities and housing inaccessibility.

Apart from high and above average rates of unemployment (comparable to EU rates of 20% and over, CEC, 2013a), most of the studied Alpine areas

are faced with a problem of a mismatch between supply and demand of jobs, as well as (as revealed in the discussions with young people) a prevalence of mono-structural economies. On one hand, there is a surplus of educated labour, and on the other, employers are confronted with difficulties in finding an appropriate workforce. The lack of a young qualified labour force is especially present in sectors with labour intensive activities such as tourism, care and traditional products particularly in those regions where such activities play a major economic role (e.g., skiing regions such as Germany's Garmisch-Partenkirchen or Italy's South Tyrol). Jobs in labour intensive activities, such as tourism and care, require high flexibility, are often of a seasonal nature, tend to include shift work, are relatively low paid, are of rather little social appreciation and usually have no compensatory work-family policies. A relevant factor is the lack of interest in these sectors at the stage of apprenticeship by the young.

The educated young returning to their home regions are justified in expecting a quality of life (Whisler et al., 2008; Hubell, 2012) - including child care, educational opportunities for their children, and cultural and leisure amenities - which should correspond to those in urban areas and thereby to their expectations. A lack of employment opportunities in modern services such as finance, ICT, scientific and technical services has been reported (Ministry of Regional Development, 2013) in several regions. Introduction of new businesses by the young is often hindered by a persistence of local policies to discourage new industries in order to support traditional ones (Jones, 1999; Frank, 2006). As reported in the Italian region of South Tyrol, they are sometimes even reluctant to take over established and traditional family-run businesses in hotel and catering. Similarly unattractive jobs seem to be in agriculture, cattle-rearing and some handicrafts. In one Swiss region, an increasingly problematic situation in finding someone to inherit a farm has been observed, thereby resulting in a potential shortfall in agricultural labour. Overall, this job market mismatch results in higher unemployment, long commutes outside the area and/or in a final permanent out-migration and a brain drain (JTS, Central Europe, 2012).

In addition to the provision of jobs, out-migration of the young can be prevented by securing af-

fordable and accessible homes. These observations have shown that young people attribute high value to a pristine and attractive natural Alpine environment but also expect a built environment that corresponds to contemporary (urban) standards. Problems related to housing affordability and accessibility are mainly expressed by the young in tourism-orientated regions. In those areas, dwellings and prices for building land are well above the national average. For people with low incomes and young families, it is thus very difficult to find affordable housing. High prices are often linked to a high influx of comparatively wealthy (in many cases, older) people into the area who often rent or buy apartments as secondary homes. During discussions, young people repeatedly pointed to the functional inadequacy of the newly constructed dwellings for permanent housing as these are often designed for holiday purposes and do not comply with the needs of modern young families, a fact already predicted as a future trend in 1987 (Messerli, 1987). Moreover, the private sector prefers to rent out dwelling units as tourist apartments for short-term periods (and for higher rent) rather than to local young families for longer periods (for lower rent), although this might mean no income outside the tourist season. On the other hand, there is a shortage of affordable rental dwellings provided by the public sector (i.e. owned by municipalities or the state) as municipalities do not have a sufficient stock of non-profit units for rental purposes (especially in Slovenia and Italy). Another problem within the real estate market is that opportunities for the establishment of businesses or start-ups by the young are often impeded by the high prices of business premises, especially in attractive tourism-orientated areas (Marot, Černič Mali, 2014).

#### 4. Policies addressing the youth question

Policy analysis was undertaken by examining the relevant documents on the whole vertical axis of policymaking from local to EU level in order to reflect on the coherency and comprehensiveness of impacts. The documents examined were specific (demography), target group (the young) or locational (the Alps). On the European level, policy

documents like the Green Papers 'Confronting Demographic Change' (CEC, 2005), 'European Spatial Development Perspectives' (CEC, 1999) and 'Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion' (CEC, 2008), mostly mention the young as one deprived social group, or in relation to youth unemployment but not tackling the subject as an urgent issue. The core EU strategic document *Europe 2020* (CEC, 2012a) introduced major objectives in relation to education and the labour market which are of significant importance to the young and are integrated into the idea of sustainable and inclusive growth. These objectives are part of target-specific programs like *EU Youth Strategy* (CEC, 2009) for the period 2010-18, *Youth in Action* (CEC, 2012b) or *Youth on the Move* (CEC, 2013b) which aim to enhance the performance of education systems through higher quality, achieving mobility of students and trainees, and facilitating the entry of young people into the labour market. Similar is the flagship initiative 'An Agenda for New Skills and Jobs'. The strategies stress the importance of good practice and transfer of knowledge in order to agree or follow a common agenda, but since they are adopted at an EU level, they cannot be considered as a specific regional policy instrument.

The main concerns of regional policies, along with *Territorial Agenda 2020* (Informal Ministerial Meeting, 2011), are territorial cohesion and challenges to EU regions, including demographic change (ageing, depopulation) and social issues (segregation of vulnerable groups). In addition to *Youth on the Move* (CEC, 2013b), the territorial agenda focuses more on long-term solutions to sustain economic activity by enhancing job creation and living conditions, and improving public services for inhabitants (with no special consideration for the young) and businesses. This applies particularly to six territorial priorities, among which are rural, peripheral and sparsely populated areas, thus also to the Alpine area.

Contrary to the territorial agenda and general EU spatial policy, the 'Alpine Convention' (Permanent Secretariat, 1995) is a territorially specific umbrella policy for Alpine regions; it requires common guidelines and policies, while monitoring demographic change to provide protection and sustainable development for the region and to secure the economic and cultural interests of the residents on the basis of co-operation (Permanent Secretariat,

2007, 2011). The declaration itself does not refer to the young as a special group; however, it dedicates special attention to the young generation through organizing different activities like an award for young scientists, information sharing, and the promotion of the annual Youth Parliament of the Alpine Convention.

Closely related to the 'Alpine Convention' is the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps (CIPRA) – the oldest non-governmental organisation in the Alps (from 1953). As a major goal, the organisation established itself as an actor to negotiate and communicate with all important stakeholders (policymakers, industry, authorities, politicians) and builds on an Alpine-wide network. Further, the organisation serves as a representative of the Alpine people, especially deprived groups and recognises the young as '*the generation most affected*'. Through its networking activities, CIPRA (2013a, 2013b) it looks for innovative ways of exchanging and incorporating the concerns of the young more efficiently, i.e., encourages other players within the Alpine region to enable the greater involvement of young people in Alpine policymaking. Similarly, other alliances, including Alparc (network of Alpine Protected Areas), the Alliance in the Alps, the Alpine Town of the Year Association and the French, Environmental Educational Network (REEMA), are allegedly interested in working more closely with young people (Del Biaggio, 2011).

Insight into lower level *objectives and measures* to tackle demographic change has been a result of a systematic review of European, national, regional and municipal documents from participating Alpine countries (Maurer *et al.*, 2012). There are two main observations: firstly, that the reviewed documents contain many general 'strategic' terms such as goal, priority, etc.; and secondly, broad population-related terms, such as inhabitant, or direct terms prefixed 'demograph-' occur with relatively moderate frequency. In relation to the specific age or population groups mentioned, terms related to 'ageing' are more common, thereby illustrating that the elderly are a higher priority than the young. The relatively rare occurrence of terms associated with the young (young, child), family policy (birth, fertility) or migration indicates that this issue attracts very little attention. Moreover, the existence of demography-related objectives and measures were in-

vestigated and then classified under four thematic headings. Among the nine youth-related objectives, the following should be pointed out: (a) to fight unemployment; (b) to increase the attractiveness of Alpine regions as a working area for young people and prevent a brain drain; (c) to maintain child care facilities and expand alternative forms of child care; (d) to foster high levels of education; increase the proportion participating in training and continuing education (Maurer *et al.*, 2012).

Of special interest in this article are the *operational programs* financed by the European Regional Development Fund as projects within specific territories. The entire Alpine area is integrated in the Alpine Space Program, while some of its borders are also covered by other programs, i.e., the Central Europe Program. The latest Alpine Space Operational Program set an overall goal to increase competitiveness and attractiveness by joint action fields where transnational cooperation was required for sustainable solutions. The young were not directly addressed by the program but could be integrated in the project pilots such as training and education initiatives (JTS, Alpine Space, 2013a).

The new Alpine Space Program is, however, still in the preparatory phase, but compared to the older program, no strong focus on demography can be identified. This is partially a consequence of the European Commission's EU 2020 policy which left demographic change out of the program's priorities. However, in the draft of the macro-strategy document for the Alps – another attempt at an umbrella strategy – the objective of balancing risks and using opportunities for demographic change is integrated. In particular "*the shrinking population, the brain drain to the cities and metropolises, the decline of basic services and abandonment of agricultural activities shaping the cultural landscapes*" are mentioned among the problems to be addressed. In addition to the need for "*policies, instruments and activities to improve social and cultural infrastructure capable of dealing with an ageing society and changing family systems*", and corresponding to CIPRA requirements, a special focus on the young and elderly, women and immigrants in relation to the self-governance capacities of local and regional units is claimed (Gloersen *et al.*, 2012a: 93).

Since EU programs of transnational cooperation are delineated on a national level, most of Al-

pine regions also fall into the area of the Central Europe Program. More explicitly than the Alpine Space program, this makes proposals on how to reduce the negative effects of demographic and social change on urban and regional development by stating seven areas of intervention. Among them are implementation of transnational strategies to counter-balance social and spatial segregation and to integrate aspects of citizen participation at an early stage of planning along with an application of cross-sectoral measures to adapt housing stock to current needs (e.g., regeneration of housing areas...) (JTS, Central Europe, 2012).

## 5. Review of projects addressing the consequences of changes to population and to the young

Part of the analysis was applied and examined the projects involving different (transnational) youth-related measures and other issues. While the main focus was on projects within the Alpine Space Program (both past and present), some projects outside this program were also examined (YURA, Re-Turn and Adapt2DC). Eleven projects with a recognised demographic and, more specifically, youth dimension, (in)directly addressed issues such as accessibility and sustainability of services (Access, Comunis), healthcare systems (NATHCARE, Alias, Alpsbiocluster), promotion of territorial development and smaller/local urban centres (Capacities, Innocite) and rural-urban governance strategies (Rurbance).

Relevant topics addressed to the young from selected projects were (see Table 2): (a) alpine specific general ageing trends; (b) depopulation and lower socio-economic and cultural capital in sparsely populated mountain regions; (c) change to regional demand and supply in public services and associated with skill deficits; (d) out-migration of the young and immigration of newcomers - issues of integration, work migration; (e) unemployment and lack of jobs, education and training; (f) changes in settlement and housing supply and demand; (g) loss of social institutions and public services, e.g. education, administration, health services, social welfare (schools, preschools) due to the ageing population and cost cutting for public administration and facilities.

Projects aimed at integrating 'younger participants of demographic change' mostly involved the preparation of strategies or actions that contributed to an improved quality of life, education and employment possibilities, networking and sharing of experiences to achieve a stimulating environment. Moreover, they included guidelines for integrating strategic local plans, improvement of public services in sparsely populated areas, and ideas for new tools and services to support migrants. Further projects entailed best practice surveys and exchanges in the fields of education, training, local marketing and service provision (healthcare, social services). Concrete pilots were implemented, for example, in DEMOCHANGE, Capacities and PUSEMOR. For example, in the German Upper Bavarian region, Allgäu, a 'technical care assistant apprenticeship' was introduced to increase the number of well-qualified staff for the caring professions in the region, while a pilot action in another German region, Garmisch-Partenkirchen, was aimed at motivating the young to improve their professional education (Forster, Ceccarelli, 2012). In the study, 'It Is Never Too Late: Skills of the Young for the Needs of the Old', special tourist packages targeting the elderly and executed by the local young were proposed for the Slovenian Upper Gorenjska region. Several projects introduced networks, e.g., of experts dealing with demographic change or institutional networks of schools or hospitals. Cooperation between relevant actors has been supported in different ways, for instance, by encouraging agreements between public and private sectors and suppliers, between companies and schools in relation to employment and by establishing workgroups of pupils, researchers, stakeholders and teachers (EB & P Umweltbüro Klagenfurt, 2011).

## 6. Discussion of the results

A statistical analysis of the data for selected regions showed some of the challenges facing the young in Alpine areas, including difficulties of service provision, a brain drain, unfavourable housing market conditions and labour market deficiencies. This constraint of provision in the smaller Alpine towns especially affected young people who, after studying

Table 2. EU funded projects addressing the consequences of demographic change among the young (2)

| Goals related to demographic change and the young                         | EU Program   |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
|---|--------------|---|---|----------------|---|---|---|--------------|---|---|--------|
|   | Alpine Space |   |   | Central Europe |   |   |   | Interreg IVC |   |   | Leader |
|   | A*           | B | C | D              | E | F | G | H            | I | J | K      |
| Strategy development  | ●            |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Utilizing the potential of small/shrinking towns                          | ●            | ● |   |                |   |   | ● |              |   | ● |        |
| Improvement of the quality of life  | ●            | ● | ● |                |   |   |   |              | ● |   | ●      |
| Promotion of gender equality  | ●            | ● |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Enhancing public participation in territorial development                 | ●            | ● |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Provision of sustainable healthcare services                              |              |   | ● |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Introduction of innovative approaches to the supply of goods and services |              | ● |   |                | ● |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Decrease of out-migration and depopulation                                | ●            | ● | ● | ●              | ● | ● | ● | ●            | ● | ● | ●      |
| Better provision of jobs  |              |   |   |                | ● |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Better provision, management of infrastructure                            |              |   |   | ●              | ● |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Placing demography related issues on the political agenda                 |              |   |   |                |   | ● |   |              |   |   |        |
| Motivation and support in the job market                                  |              |   |   |                |   |   | ● |              |   |   |        |
| Outcomes and results  |              |   |   |                |   |   |   | ●            |   |   |        |
| (Transnational) strategic documents                                       | ●            | ● |   |                |   |   | ● | ●            | ● |   | ●      |
| Policy guidelines, recommendations  |              |   |   |                |   |   | ● |              |   |   |        |
| New/improved regional and local (spatial) plans                           |              |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| New instruments   |              |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| New IT solutions  |              |   |   | ●              |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Change of values, improved image of a region                              |              |   |   |                |   |   |   | ●            |   | ● |        |
| Improved (social) services  |              |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Good practice survey, database  |              | ● |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Pilot actions   | ●            | ● |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Network(s)  | ●            | ● | ● |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Students research projects  |              |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Photo contest   | ●            |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Participating regions from Alpine countries                               |              |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Austria   | ●            | ● | ● | ●              | ● |   |   | ●            |   | ● | ●      |
| Switzerland   | ●            | ● | ● | ●              | ● |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| Germany   | ●            | ● | ● | ●              | ● | ● |   |              |   |   |        |
| Slovenia  | ●            | ● | ● | ●              | ● | ● | ● |              |   |   | ●      |
| Italy   | ●            | ● | ● | ●              | ● | ● | ● | ●            |   |   | ●      |
| Czech Republic  |              |   |   |                |   |   |   |              |   |   |        |
| France  |              | ● |   |                |   |   |   |              | ● |   |        |

\*A – Demochange, B – Capacities, C – NATHCARE, D – QUALIMA, E – PUSEMOR, F – ReTurn, G – Adapt2DC, H – YURA, I – PADIMA, J – DART, K – My Featured Space  
Source: JTS Alpine Space, 2006, 2007; Corrado, 2011; EB & P Umweltbuero Klagenfurt, 2011; UNCEM, 2011; Urban Planning Institute, 2011; Lombardy region, 2011, 2012; Hochschule Muenchen, 2012; ILB, 2012

in urban centres, prefer to remain there instead of returning to the smaller Alpine town centres where they encounter the problem of finding somewhere to live (Jentsch, 2006; Parry et al., 2010; JTS, Central Europe, 2012; Hummel et al., 2013). The housing market trend was very serious especially in mono-structural (skiing) tourist areas which prioritise secondary homes, thus increasing prices and channelling development money into a single economic sector that might not be appealing to all young people (Kianicka et al., 2006). Additionally, public investments lag behind because private ones are usually given priority over state-funded non-profit construction projects, as in the case of the Slovenian Alpine region.

Aside from the negative spiral of first losing population and secondly services (health and child care, public transport); and then more population, hence producing a need for restructuring the settlement pattern, the Alps should build its future on the basis of an Alpine regional and local identity which is common to all regions. Qualitative research has shown that young people absorb an Alpine identity, are well attached to localities and, therefore, have a connection to the provision of services which can be provided through European funding, and this could be a sufficient pull factor. On the contrary, their absence from local and regional decision-making processes has been revealed as a push factor. Although their participation in planning has been promoted for three decades (United Nations, 1989; Chechoway et al., 1995; Adams & Ingham, 1998; Knowles-Yáñez, 2002), it has hardly been put into practice, a point which was confirmed in the focus groups. The explanation prevailed that politicians do not want to adapt their long-established decision-making practice, especially because the opinion of the young might be found too contradictory or not capital-oriented enough in comparison to theirs. However, there are some positive examples of more open approaches to policy making (Buchecker et al., 2010), but they do not especially promote the young.

Additionally, their absence from the political process is evident from an overview of policies. Although in 2012 the youth question was placed high on the EU agenda, there are no policies and guidelines that specifically address this macro-region. Yet, the analysis has shown that the problems of the young are region-specific and are connected to

tourism as an economic activity and the impact of terrain on the provision of services. For now, the absence of these policies has been partially solved by transnational projects in which regions in partnership, develop joint solutions to the problems raised above.

In the projects of the European Territorial Co-operation programs, infrastructural investments are limited because of program limitations, and project outcomes are usually policy related, namely strategies or guidelines; an example of which is the road map for tackling demographic change in a single region under the DEMOCHANGE project (Forster, Ceccarelli, 2012). Their role is to push forward awareness of youth issues and to improve their inclusion in policymaking. Further, all projects examined had a strong dimension of connecting different stakeholders and mediating between parties, thus raising awareness of issues which are often neglected by major decision-makers. Moreover, their less formal and political nature encourages the integration of the young in policymaking. The major added value of these projects has been the development of innovative solutions at a transnational level, thereby enabling different – out of the box – views on problems, a comparison of situations and policies and an exchange of good practices. Additionally, projects have helped building and strengthening Alpine identity because they empower old, or create new, networks (usually difficult to maintain), hence triggering actors from their local reality into a more pan-Alpine way of thinking. The broad selection of solutions – such as instruments to motivate the young to enter training for skill-deficit professions, technologically advanced IT support (on-line public services), new and adapted types of child care, actions for improving integration and employment of returning migrants, – show that regions are not entirely unequipped for addressing youth-related demographic issues. The introduction of new economic and social activities in villages as a key panacea to prevent out-migration from villages has also been recognised in mountainous regions outside Europe (Langroodi, Ardabili, 2007). The advantage of transnational projects over established legal measures is an approach to problems from a bottom-up perspective.

However, it should be borne in mind that transferability and utilisation of these solutions depend

on several factors, including the regional/local governance system, its administrative capacity as well as national policies (Smail, 2007; Klofsten et al., 2010). For example, new labour market instruments rely on the education system, and therefore, the advanced pilot action introduced in Germany could, only to some extent, be transferable to another country. Furthermore, the projects and their implementation might represent a one-off in which intangible impacts are difficult to identify (Metis, 2010). To overcome this problem, the project facilitators are asked to provide a way of looking at durability as well as a capitalisation proposal. Further, to continue the activities, regions can, at the end of the six-year program period, apply for capitalisation funds in the frame of the macro-regional program (JTS, Alpine space, 2013b).

## 7. Conclusion

The article has discussed the added value of the European Territorial Co-operation program to assist young people in the Alps towards a better quality of life. Assets of these projects are recognized as two-fold: (a) projects with their activities enable the young to enter policy making processes, e.g. strategy preparation; (b) the transnational environment that projects create enables a soft approach to developing/evaluating, transferring and adapting innovative solutions in similar regions but different countries. While the figures and results of quantitative and qualitative surveys reveal that smaller towns especially and distant locations from urban centres are losing the young as important social capital; the projects financed by the EU are showing various ways how this capital could be first attracted back and then utilized in a way that the local economy could also benefit. In an ideal scenario, the young and educated return with the knowledge and fresh ideas that can rejuvenate the mono-structural, tourism-oriented Alpine region.

As gathered from the research, Alpine regions recognize demographic change more as a problem than a challenge which offers multiple opportunities. This is evident, for instance, in Alpine regions which attract non-EU immigrants who are usually seen as balancing a negative demography, though

many researchers, Battaglia and Iraldo (2011) have shown already that such immigration cannot compensate for larger negative population trends. A positive case for recognising the potential of the young as Alpine capital concerns transnational projects which have enabled the policy arena to introduce different initiatives and practices, both communicating the importance of keeping the young in the Alps and securing a higher quality of life for them and not only for secondary home owners. Specifically targeted strategies, adopted as a result of projects, e.g., by the YURA project (ILB, 2012), suggest different actions, such as assistance to the young in their career choices, encouragement and establishment of long-term cooperation between schools and regional companies and the establishment of transferable cooperation models and on-the-job training strategies to help secure job market performance. By applying these measures awareness of the diversity of locations in the Alps, which means that there is no 'one-size-fits-all solution'; solutions should be place-specific. The most relevant opportunities, as recognised by the projects, as well as by the new Alpine Space, were listed as activating the young to engage in civil society to compensate for the rising demand on public services; the utilisation of the image and brand of the Alps to attract younger people and families to the region and the introduction of new services in healthcare, including child care. These measures are very likely to yield results because according to the figures and demographic theories, the Alps are very varied and slow in any transformation process: while some of the figures regarding migration and the growth might show concern, family patterns change only slowly and are dependent on tradition and culture. The third important factor is economic which conditions the other 'soft' factors such as a shift in values, opportunities to realise oneself (reported as a problem in focus groups), a prolonged education period, and postponed starting of families because of economic dependence. On the one side, the Alps are only another ageing European region, on another, they are partially rejuvenated by immigration and new approaches to tackle demographic change as provided also by transnational projects. How much and to what extent the young will be able to benefit from the projects and turn the corner to the positive demographic trends, only the future will show.

In terms of threats, the analysis detected a contradiction between the systematic proactive management of population growth through retirement residents in the real estate market which then limits opportunities for the young and excludes them from local decision-making.

To conclude, policymakers are expected to recognise the young as valuable members of society and, in this vein, work on the future of the Alps together. Otherwise, it might as well happen as Schleicher-Tappeser (2006) has predicted - the Alps “will fall apart into individual backyards of large cities” which will significantly dissolve Alpine identity as we know it now.

## Notes

- (1) Data collection and comparison was limited by national and regional statistical databases which work with different definitions and time ranges.
- (2) Sources and the full names of the projects are Demochange: Demographic Change in the Alps (Hochschule München, 2012); Nathcare: Networking Alpine Health for Continuity of Care in Alpine Space (Lombardy region, 2012); Qualima: Quality of Life Improvement by Supporting Public and Private Services in the Rural Areas of the Alps (JTS, Alpine space, 2006); Pusemor: Public Services in Sparsely Populated Mountain Regions – New Needs and Innovative Strategies (JTS, Alpine space, 2007); Padima: Policies Against Depopulation in Mountain Areas; Re-Turn: Regions Benefitting from Returning Migrants (Corrado, 2011); Adapt2DC: New Innovative Solutions to Adapt Governance and Management of Public Infrastructure and Services to Demographic Change in Shrinking Regions and Cities of CE (Urban Planning Institute of the Republic of Slovenia [UIRS], 2011); YURA: Developing Transnational Transversal Youth Strategies in Regions with Migration (Ministry of Regional Development and Transport, 2013); DART: Declining, Ageing and Regional Transformation (ILB, 2012); My Featured Space: Sparkling Science Program (EB & P Umweltbüro Klagenfurt, 2011); Capacities

– Competitiveness actions and policies for Alpine cities (Lombardy region, 2011); Return: Regions benefiting from returning migrants (UNCCEM, 2011).

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