

## **SIMILAR FUTURE CHALLENGES IN REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN TWO REGIONS UPPER STYRIA WEST AND POMURJE**

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### **Abstract**

The paper in hand deals with analogous current challenges in regional development in the NUTS III regions Upper Styria West and Pomurje. This comparative analysis will be based on various economic and social indicators and background information in order to detect similarities as well as differences between these regions. The paper's key question is, if the two regions along the river Mur namely Upper Styria West and Pomurje are comparable at least in some fields and if good practice examples of regional development are transferable and convertible. This may serve as an incentive for a sustainable regional development strategy along the Slovene part of river Mur in Pomurje.

**Key words:** desettlement, structurally weak regions, Mur river, regional development, negative demography change.

## **PODOBNI BODOČI IZZIVI V REGIONALNEM RAZVOJU V REGIJAH ZAHODNA ZGORNJA ŠTAJERSKA IN POMURJE**

### **Izvleček**

Pričujoči članek obravnava analogne aktualne izzive na področju regionalnega razvoja NUTS III regij Zahodna Zgornja Štajerska in Pomurje. Primerjalna analiza temelji na raznovrstnih ekonomskih in socialnih dejavnikih ter podatkih, da bi izpostavila tako razlike kot tudi podobnosti med obema regijama. Ključno vprašanje je, ali sta regiji Zahodna Zgornja Štajerska in Pomurje vzdolž reke Mure primerljivi vsaj na določenih področjih in ali so primeri dobre prakse regionalnega razvoja primerljivi in uporabni. Slednje naj služi kot izziv za strategijo sonaravnega regionalnega razvoja vzdolž slovenskega dela reke Mure in Pomurja.

**Ključne besede:** razseljevanje, strukturno šibke regije, reka Mura, regionalni razvoj, negativne demografske spremembe.

## **1. Introduction**

During its app. 450 km the river Mur (Mura) passes different types of landscapes and regions, which are characterized through individual regional distinctive characteristics. From physic-geographical point of view the river shows its typical variety from the mountainous upper course to the middle course and its lower reach. On its way to the confluence with the Drava the Mur offers a lot of potentials for regional development measures and opportunities.

In former times it was an important source of economic prosperity and human settlement in Styria. During the industrial age and after the World War II the river as an important natural resource laid the foundation for regional development along the Mur valley. But the river was negatively afflicted by big ecological damages through many decades. Many of the natural river banks and flood plains had been destroyed for ever. Nowadays the ecological situation of the landscape around the river is much better and even declared as protected. As a result the river Mur has significant potentials for future activities that offer added value for the communities on both sides of the river not only in the tourism sector.

On its way to the confluence with Drava the Mur forms a common border with the neighboring country Slovenia. That allowed common initiatives and projects, mainly concerning environmental protection but also transboundary cultural events. Some central activities along the river Mur will be mentioned and analyzed in this paper. Both the outcomes and the added value of the selected measures and projects will be presented in regard to their applicability in other parts along the river Mur.

## **2. The River Mur and the Importance for the Regions**

On the one hand rivers are generally linking regions on the way from the spring to the confluence, on the other hand they are also barriers hard to overcome. This is the reason why rivers are very often borders to neighboring territories but also best practice examples of cross-border cooperation.

Nevertheless the river Mur has characterized and influenced the regions on both sides of its banks throughout the times. People living in these regions have developed their living space partly on basis of the river and its flood plains (food, transport, commerce, energy etc.). But this development led to a negative influence which is manifested in a strong restricted natural movement of the river Mur (river management e.g. river regulation, dams, drain, power plants, industrial water usage etc.). At the present time the original natural potentials of the river become more and more important for regional development measures such as touristic added value activities (e.g. Life-Project MurErleben, RISE Interreg). Many programs emphasize these potentials like the "Tour de Mur" bike route along the river Mur as the most popular example. A good example of cross border co-operations provides the Austrian-Slovene Mur Commission. The main task of the commission is the integral consideration of water management affairs (Stalzer 2001, 7) including groundwater protection and water supply.

Nowadays - in a united Europe - it is even more important to foster the people-linking relevance of a river, to set potentials together into force, so that also the young people get to know about similarities what should lead to co-operations in future development of the regions and better understanding of each other on both sides of the river. Busek (2001, 9)

underlines that the river does not only connect landscapes but also social and cultural entities. This should result in a common better understanding between neighbors and in a prospering economic welfare development of the regions along the river Mur.

### 3. Similarities and Differences of Upper Styria West and the Pomurje Region

A general introduction to the regional development will be followed by a juxtaposition by means of certain regional indicators and aspects. In order to be able to give recommendations concerning regional development strategies and measures it is necessary to analyze the degree of similarities. Based on these results a meaningful transfer of relevant projects activities with adequate added value for regional development will be discussed.

#### 3.1 Upper Styria West – from heavy industry to a new era?

The region Upper-Styria West, which will serve as a good practice example in the following, is a NUTS III region, which consists of three districts (Murau, Judenburg and Knittelfeld). The region has app. 107.500 resident population (2005) on app. 3.000 km<sup>2</sup> (density 36 people per km<sup>2</sup>).

As a part of the so called “Mur-Mürz-Fluting” this region was one of the most prosperous areas of Austria based on a heavy industry and mining. Mineral resources, water and wood brought about colonization and led to the development of road infrastructure even in isolated territories. These regions are closely connected with monostructure, in other words with the development and decline of the so called “old industry”. Hence economic and social problems are very much alike.

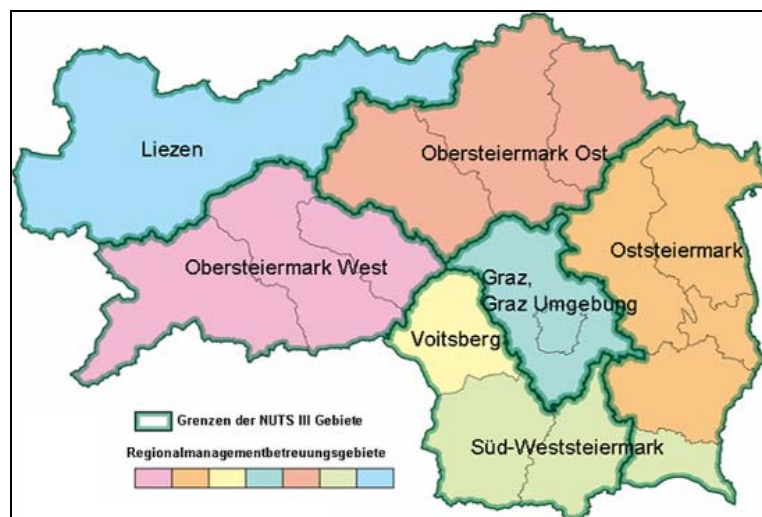


Figure 1: Styria and the Region Upper-Styria-West (Obersteiermark West).  
(Source: <http://www.regionext.steiermark.at/cms/ziel/14146250/DE/>)

The service sector is hardly developed. As a consequence the industrial regions are dominated by the secondary sector, mainly by only one line of business or even by only one big company or business group, which are still geared to mass production. Furthermore this company owns most of the property operates a distinct economic and social life and hinders settlement of

new industrial business groups. Another Austrian phenomenon is of state-owned industry, in some ways an inconsistency with economic law/legislation.

More monostructure can be noticed on the labour market in terms of too many skilled workers organised in one sector. In addition the Austrian trade union still influences policy measures and impedes a reorientation or innovation of the labour market. Consequently the unemployment rate (in particular youth unemployment) corresponds to global trend and is much higher in these (industrial) areas than in the rest of the country. Early retirement is one efficient strategy to deal with unemployment. Also the demographic situation shows a downward tendency; especially the younger generation is predisposed to migration.

In the period of 1991–2001 the region faced a decline in population of 2.3 %, (compared to the province Styria with –0.1 % and Austrian national level with +3.0 %) rather high. The prognosis shows a continuing decline of –4.2 % from 2001 till 2011. The strongest loss of population can be recognized and expected in the most western district of Murau (Syrian Government 2007, 4).

The reason for this negative trend results from a change of the industrial structure beginning in the early eighties. Beside the three district capitals the northern and southern peripheral areas were most seriously affected. Furthermore the decrease of population (between 1991 and 2001: –2716) can be ascribed to a negative balance of migration, whereas the balance of births was positive in that period (+172) (Styrian Government 2007, 8).

According to common trends a demographic shift from younger to older generations characterizes the region. The percentage of people younger than 15 in the region Upper Styria West of 16.5 % in 2001 correlates with the Styrian average. The prognosis for 2011 shows a reduced figure of 13.5 % with a persistent downward trend in future (2031: –15.3 %; table 1).

*Table 1: Development of inhabitants.*

<b>Key Figures</b>	<b>Murau</b>	<b>Judenburg</b>	<b>Knittelfeld</b>	<b>Styria</b>	<b>Austria</b>
Inhabitants (1991–2001) Change in %	–1.5	–1.5	–1.2	0.6	1.8
Inhabitants (2002–2005) Change in %	–2.4	–3.8	0.5	–0.1	3.0
Prognosis (2001–2011) Change in %	–4.6	–4.9	–2.6	0.1	3.1

*Source: Fischer, Hasler, 2008.*

The development of the population density shows the relatively low but constant value in Murau, in the western part of the region. Knittelfeld shows a insignificant, Judenburg the highest decrease of population density. In comparison to the district of Leoben bordering on Knittelfeld in the east, the demographic situation could even be worse. Leoben's decrease of population density constitutes a minus of 15 % between 1981 and 2001, keeping in mind that this city once counted more than 36.000 inhabitants (in 2007 around 25.000).

In fact the future does not seem to be promising even if the community has an adequate infrastructure and other resources at its disposal. Positive figures of population increase can be observed only in the vicinity of centers, which offer labour. Therefore regional actors foremost regional decision makers are challenged to overcome the economic and demographic downward cycle by taking the initiative. Some of these initiatives will be presented in Chapter 4.

### 3.2 Pomurje – a region in the border quadrangle

Although the primary sector is of minor importance from Slovenian national employment point of view (9 % in 2007) compared to Austrian level (12.1 % in 2007), Pomurje is still dominated by agriculture as a characteristic landscape element as well as in socio-economic terms. In Pomurje 14 % of the labour force can be assigned to the primary sector and more than three quarters of total utilised agricultural area or twice as much as the national average are covered by field crops. Fertile soil and plains easy to cultivate provide good conditions for growing cereals, so in this region production of these crops is by far the highest in Slovenia (Slovene Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia: Regions in figures 2007, 30.) Furthermore Pomurje has the highest level of state aid per capita together with Zasavska and Osrednjeslovenska (Ministry of Finance-State Aid Monitoring Department 2005, 20). Moreover Pomurje has the highest unemployment rate in Slovenia coupled with a low GDP per capita (9,100 €) with only 69 % of the national average in 2005 (Fig. 2).

By contrast natural features provide good possibilities for tourism development. Health tourism is already established and recently also rural tourism at the wine trails is gaining importance. Tourism statistics show that Pomurje offers more bed places than the national average of offered bed places and rank in fourth position of overnight stays (Regions in figures, 2007, 26.).

Fortunately heavy industry has never taken hold in this part of Slovenia. Therefore Pomurje still shows good ecological conditions as regards water reservoirs, air quality and other natural parameters. Industry is characterized by a mix of manufacturing, chemical and food-processing industries, which were affected by stagnation of these traditional branches in Europe (Hummelsbrunner; Mesl, 1995, 7, cited in AK Styria: [www.akstmk./pictures/d12/Osterweiterung.doc](http://www.akstmk./pictures/d12/Osterweiterung.doc)).

In 1989 Pomurje still had more than 130,000 inhabitants (6.5 % of Slovenia). After the political change and the independency many inhabitants particularly in the working age migrated to the western parts of country, which can be deduced from the migration balance. Therefore the process of “brain drain” can be taken for granted. On the other hand the birth balance shows a steady decrease. This is the fact that in the year of 2007 less than 122,000 inhabitants are statistically registered. (Fig. 3)

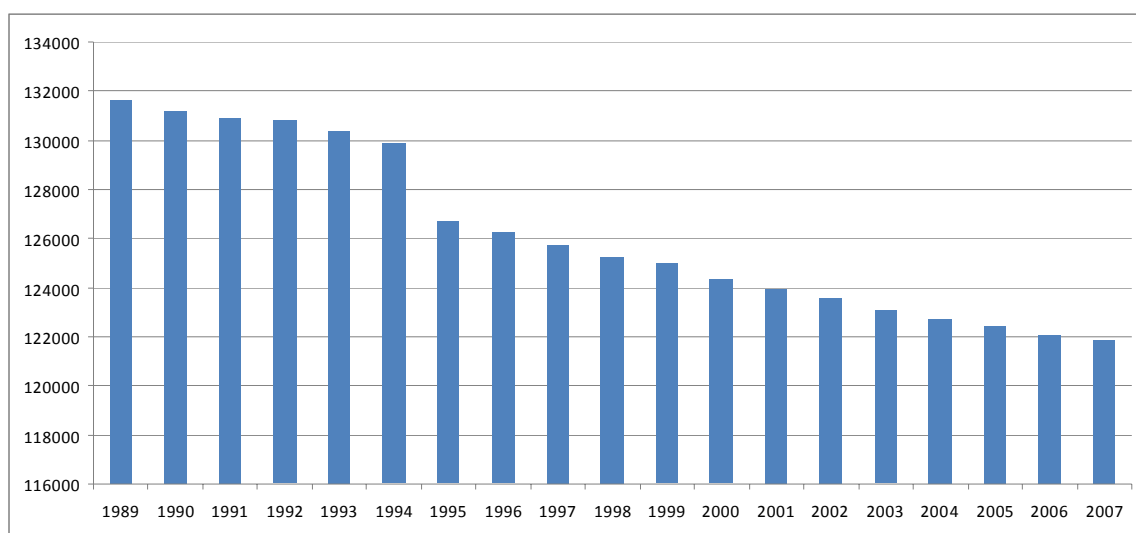


Figure 2: Inhabitants of the Pomurje region. (Source: Statistic Slovenia, own illustration)

Fig. 4 **Napaka! Vira sklicevanja ni bilo mogoče najti.** shows the age structure in Pomurje within the period of 1990 and 2007. Someone notices that the group of “below 45 years” shifted to the group of “over 45 years”, which became the biggest group in 2007. By linking the values of the year 1990 a well balanced demographic pyramid arises, doing the same with the values of 2007 an adverse pyramid of population appears.

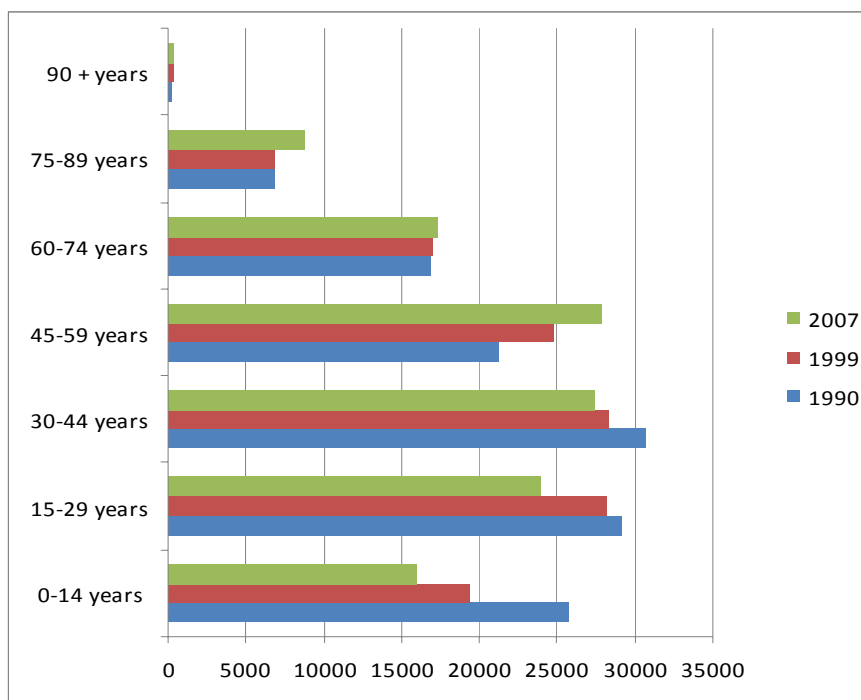


Figure 3: Pyramid of population of the Pomurje region. (Source: Statistic Slovenia, own illustration)

### 3.3 Juxtaposition of both regions

At first glance these above described regions do not have a lot in common, because of natural and as well as cultural and historic realities. At second glance many commonalities in terms of similar challenges and formations in regional development become evident. According to the precedent chapters we will apply the following criteria/grouping for comparing both regions:

- Natural Potentials
- Demography
- Economic Structure

The Austrian alpine region Upper Styria West contrasts strongly with the Pannonian landscape of Pomurje. Geomorphologic conditions as well as natural resources are hardly comparable except for the sources of geothermal water (see also touristic use) and the dense afforestation, reflecting in the processing industry (e.g. Styrian Wood Cluster). 60 % of the Styrian territory is covered by forest and therefore the most densely wooded province of Austria. As a consequence the forest and timber industry is one of the most important economic branches of Styria, with 5,300 companies, 58,000 jobs and with a turnover of 4 billion € and is still far from fully been exploited (<http://www.holzcluster-steiermark.at>). As an interface between economy, science and politics the Holzcluster Steiermark GmbH was founded in 2001. It supports forest and wood related businesses by strengthening enterprises along the value chain especially in rural areas. One core initiative is the so called “HIZ Wood

Innovation Centre” in Zeltweg, which offers wood-related businesses space as well as research and development facilities. Also in Slovenia this industry has not tapped its full potential keeping in mind that 58 % of the Slovenian territory is covered by forest. In 2005 more than 33 % of Pomurje were declared as wooded areas. At first glance this figure is below national average. Keeping in mind that additionally 61 % of the Pomurje region are used for agricultural purpose and that Pomurje is affected by desettlement phenomenon, one may become aware of the full wood-related development potential in the future.

The above-mentioned natural circumstances have an impact on the density of population (Tab. 2) of 36 versus 91 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>. This leads to demographic challenges. As aforementioned a continuous negative trend can be observed (Fig 3), characterised by a negative migration balance, low birth-rate and advancing aging of the population in both regions. According to forecasts this trend will continue in the upcoming decades (cf. Amt der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung 2007).

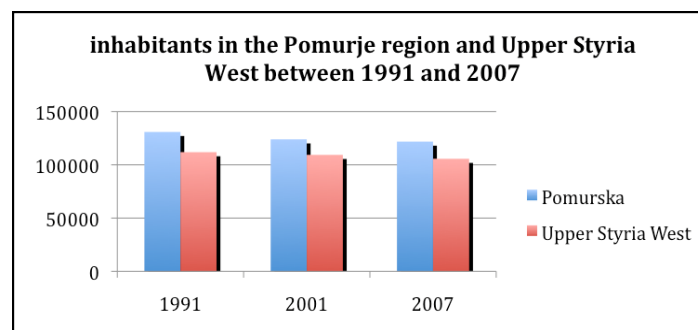


Figure 4: Comparison of inhabitants in the Pomurje region and Upper Styria West between 1991 and 2007. (Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and Provincial Government Styria, own illustration)

In Upper Styria West migration was coupled with the decline of the heavy industry in the later seventies, whereas in the Region of Pomurje was dominated by the ailing agricultural sector. Three quarters of Pomurje are still dominated by agriculture and linked food processing industry. No wonder that this region is also called the “bread basket” of Slovenia. Nevertheless economic development is lacking behind national average as regards GDP per capita, unemployment and other economic indicators. Other industries such as manufacturing, pharmaceuticals or vehicle construction remain below expectations.

The industry sector is still the leading force in both regions, (in Upper Styria West particularly in the eastern counties Judenburg and Knittelfeld) which can be seen in (Fig. 6). According to sectoral change theory there is still a potential for development within the tertiary sector.

The western part has a mainly rural and agrarian character, which makes it more attractive for touristic use. On the contrary Pomurje was never affected by heavy industry, but is also characterised by labour-intensive industry like food-processing, chemical-pharmaceutical or automotive businesses. A stagnation in these branches result in a high structural coupled with long-term unemployment.

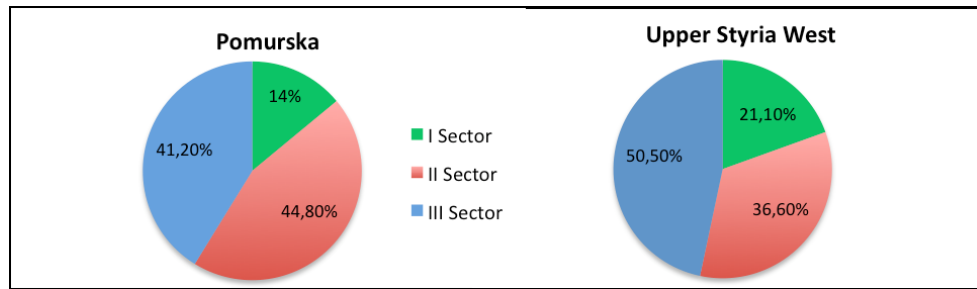


Figure 5: Employment rate by economic sectors in Pomurje and Upper Styria West in 2005. Own preparation. (Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and Provincial Government Styria, Own illustration)

Although both regions can not be classified as tourist destinations from national perspective, this sector has gained importance over the past years. While Pomurje’s tourist concepts focus on traditional themes “Wine and spa”, Upper Styria West tries to develop the wellness sector beside the already established winter tourism in the county of Murau. In both cases the Mur River has been rediscovered as a trademark with special focus on biking, natural conservation of floodplains and cross border relations. Comparing touristic indicators such as tourist arrivals, overnight stays and bed places Upper Styria West shows a bigger tourism dimensions in all cases. Nevertheless the ratio between foreign and domestic tourists of overnight stays is with 46 : 54 the same (see Fig. 6). Consequently these regions can be identified as domestic tourist regions, which also holds for Styria but not for Slovenia.

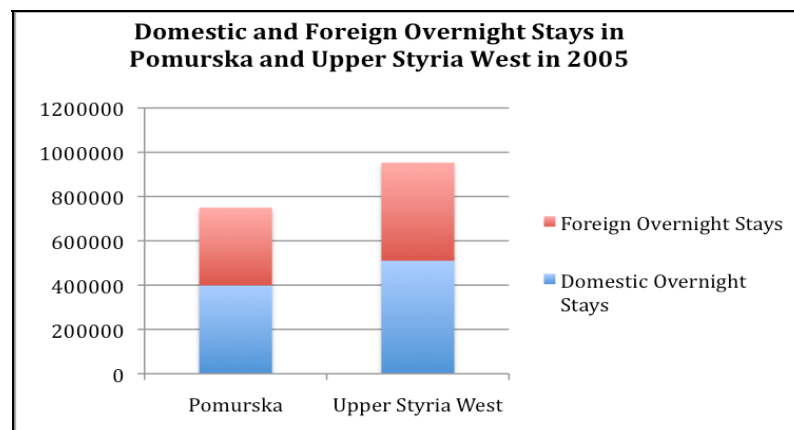


Figure 6: Domestic and Foreign Overnight Stays in Pomurje and Upper Styria West in 2005. (Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and Provincial Government Styria, own illustration)



One recently revealed integrative regional development approach in Upper Styria West is the so called “industrial tourism” or also called “Industry and Tourism” by linking both sectors. At first glance connecting industry and tourism as a regional development tool does not appear very consistent, because both are associated with opposed characteristics and are conflicting economic sectors. The industry sector concentrates on the production of goods in contrast to tourism as part of the guest oriented service sector. Consequently industrial regions are often associated with smoking chimneys, contaminated landscapes and unattractive or dangerous manufacturing plants. On the contrary, tourism destinations call recreation linked with natural and impressive landscapes to mind. Nevertheless correlations between a successful economy and tourism activities in a region exist (e.g. “Route of Industrial Heritage” in Germany, as well as several case studies in Great Britain and the US) but there



are still a lot of barriers and obstacles, which can occur by trying to connect them. Especially in old industrial regions industrial tourism could be an opportunity to overcome a downward cycle (Weigl, 2008; Pechlaner 2008).

Summarizing, linking elements between these regions such as the relevance of industry and agriculture (even though not at the same percentage level) are palpable. Due to the alpine climate and geomorphology intensive agriculture is replaced in Upper Styria West by dairy and stock farming as well as forestry, whereas in Pomurje wine, fruit and vegetable can be grown. Limited production capacities make additional source of income necessary. Consequently sideline basis and small sized farms are prevalent on both sides. Furthermore both regions have to struggle with social challenges such as a high unemployment rate, aging population and a low regional gross domestic product (below national average) coupled with an underdeveloped tertiary sector. Comparing the employment by economic sectors again the Pomurje's agricultural dominance becomes evident, as well as high percentage of the secondary sector combined with an expandable tertiary sector (especially in tourism industry) in both regions. From tourism perspective both regions are developable, although with different topic orientation. Pomurje is predisposed for wine and spa, whereas Upper Styria West has a diversified mix of alpine winter (e.g. skiing, cross country) and summer tourism (e.g. family hiking and alpine relax) with an increasing number of high quality accommodations.

*Tab. 2: Juxtaposition of selected statistics in Pomurje and Upper Styria West.*

	<b>Pomurje</b>	<b>Upper Styria West</b>
<b>Location</b>	Outskirts (Slovenia)	Outskirts (Styria)
<b>Topography</b>	 Open, hilly and flat	 Closed, mountainous
<b>Size</b>	Around 1,340 km <sup>2</sup>	Around 3,000 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Permanent settlement area</b>	952 km <sup>2</sup>	659 km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Inhabitants*</b>	Around 122,000	Around 10,7000
<b>Density</b>	91 inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup>	36 inhabitants/km <sup>2</sup>
<b>Demography</b>	excess of age	excess of age
<b>Migration</b> Between 1991 and 2007	-6,9 %	-5,5 %
<b>Natural increase*</b>	-443	-229
<b>Number of employed pers.*</b>	42,198	40,140
<b>Number of unemployed pers.*</b>	9,466	3,037

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<b>Unemployment rate</b>	13.7 %	9.3 %
<b>National Gross average income*</b>	66 %	76 %
<b>Bed Places</b>	4,639	13,280
<b>Tourist Arrivals</b>	179,078	227,465
<b>Overnight stays</b>	749,876	953,295

\*Reference year 2005

Source: Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia and Provincial Government Styria, own preparation.

#### **4. Good Practice Examples future-oriented Projects**

Judging from the statistics in section 3.1. the future does not seem to be very promising for these regions even if they have an adequate infrastructure and cultural as well as natural heritage at their disposal. In fact regional stakeholders primarily regional decision makers (including governmental and non governmental actors) endeavour to develop future strategies and to attract investors for their projects. Additionally the Regional Management Upper Styria West acts as an important economic impetus for networking initiatives and co-funded projects for more than one decade. Subsequently selected project corresponding to the major challenges in both region will be presented.

##### **4.1 The “Demography” Project**

Respective to the demographic developments in both regions the authors would like to introduce the so called “Challenge Demography” project which is running in the region Upper-Styria-West (duration: March 2007 till September 2008). The project has the slogan in the sense of: ”moving closer (new encounters) forcing new possibilities”.

Preliminary goals of the project are raising the awareness in the region and building up of a regional network. The project has four tracks, such as housing, labor and economy, infrastructure and live together. 330 persons working in 16 groups are responsible for proper results for problems caused by the drastic demographic change in the region. The main focus thereby lies on the development of an inter-communal pricing model. The fact is that financial contributions for infrastructure e.g. water supply, waste management, sewage treatment etc. become more expensive while the population which occupies these services decreases. In the case of local supply (mainly groceries) the gap between the excess of age and therefore less mobile population together with the disappearance of small local grocers has to be closed by innovative measures (e.g. mobile traders).

Summarizing the following two approaches turned out to be promising: firstly the strategy of avoidance (mitigation of migration) and secondly the strategy of adaption (adaption on the results of the demographic change in all areas of life). One successful initiative to avoid migration of younger generations is the free after-school-care for all age groups. Especially for young (well trained) women the compatibility of family and career is a crucial point for staying in the region or not.

#### **4.2 The LIFE Project “Mur experience”**

Efforts are undertaken on the part of the European Union to concentrate and to coordinate the countless Europe-wide endeavors for nature conservation. For this reason, a Europe-wide network of nature reserves named “Natura 2000” was established. In the last few years the focus was put on the selection of adequate areas; now the attention is directed towards the duties associated with the designation of nature reserves.

Within the EU grant program “LIFE Nature” (from 2003–2007) the restoration and, respectively, the improvement and long-term protection of near-natural floodplains and river landscapes in the districts of the Upper-Styria-West region (Murau, Judenburg, Knittelfeld), from the Salzburg-Styria federal state border into the Knittelfeld region, are proceeded with under the heading “Inner-alpine River Catchment Management Upper Mur”. This is done in consideration of the required flood control measures. The project area encompasses an area of 1,243 hectares. The Upper Mur is considered one of the environmentally most valuable rivers in Austria. Approximately 75% of the watercourses are preserved near-naturally. Over the next 4 years 2 million € will be invested in the improvement of the situation on a 90 km stretch which reaches from the Salzburg-Styria federal state border into the Knittelfeld region. Yet, there are some negative tendencies of development such as the systematic expansion of the river, i.e. the straightening of the course of the river, increased erosion due to bed load deprivation, and the disturbance of the dynamics of the watercourse. Because of the construction of hydroelectric power plants there are disruptions of the watercourse continuum. The consequence is a steady decrease of fish stock in the project area. The loss of floodplain forests due to unnatural forest management which eventually leads to a transformation of near-natural forest stands to artificial forests. The result is a steady decline of the floodplain forest stand as well as a loss of habitats characteristic of floodplains.

The project consists of various sections such as preparatory planning, the creation of a management plan, purchase of land, measures of natural space management, and public relations. Even though this concerns inner-alpine river catchment management, these action focal points could also be interesting and profitable for other river regions, especially since they will lead to specific implementation measures during the process, starting with planning and by way of including stakeholders. The result, besides the improvement of the ecological condition, is a certain social sustainability, which manifests itself in an increased environmental awareness-raising. This, in turn, forms the basis for the acceptance of further improvement measures such as

- Preservation, regeneration, and ecological improvement of floodplain forests;
- Regeneration, improvement, and interlinking of floodplain water bodies;
- Improvement of the passability of the Mur;
- Securing of and initiation of characteristic structures of water bodies;
- Ecological awareness-raising.

#### **4.3 RISE - Regional Identity and Culture – Strengths Development and Environment Action**

This INTERREG IIIC Project (duration from 2004–2006) focused on the implementation of innovative measures and activities in the field of regional development in densely populated rural spaces based on experience exchange between the partner regions.

The project partners faced similar potentials and challenges and therefore defined the

following problem areas (Office Teilraum Deggendorf/Plattling 2007: p. 7):

- new approaches and new forms of cooperation such as public partnership models, new governance, exchange of know how on transnational level
- maintaining and developing cultural heritage and cultural life increasing the value attached to them with a view to further development and economic utilization of regional identity
- supporting structural change in the producing sector on the basis of regional skills and raw materials especially in the field of wood technologies
- conservation and maintenance of natural resources, embodiment for local recreation and tourism development

The following two pilot projects, both dealing with rural tourism, implemented within the framework of RISE in the region “Upper Styria West” could serve as an incentive for the Pomurje region. The first one was aligned with the specific needs of the target group of motorcyclists. Several actor groups from the industry, the economy and the media were brought together with promoters for motorcycle events to develop tailor-made products (e.g. joint motorcycle tour folder, separate Internet platform with necessary specially selected tours to safety tips and leisure information to separate route descriptions).

The second subproject concentrated on sustainable resting places at cycle tracks alongside the river Mur. Both Pomurje and Upper Styria West count on the Mur cycle track, which became one of the touristic cross-border flagships over the past decades, as a tourist attraction. Within a cooperation between schools, municipalities and industry using endogenous potential rest areas and picnic areas for bikers and local day trippers in the area of Aichfeld-Murboden were designed and selected. Furthermore these stops serve as information points and are designed in such a way that they can be installed in urban as rural areas. Consequently these resting areas can serve as a model for other regions.

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## **PODOBNI BODOČI IZZIVI V REGIONALNEM RAZVOJU V REGIJAH ZAHODNA ZGORNJA ŠTAJERSKA IN POMURJE**

### **Povzetek**

Na prvi pogled regiji, ki ju v smislu skupnega imenovalca razmejuje 150 km dolga rečna struga Mure, nista sosedni pokrajini, ki bi si bili podobni. Kljub vsemu smo lahko v prispevku opozorili na močne povezovalne elemente med obema regijama. Obe se soočata s podobnimi ekonomskimi ter socialnimi težavami ter zaostajata za državnim povprečjem. Tako kmetijski sektor kakor tudi industrija sta v obeh regijah nesorazmerno zastopana (Štajerska vlada 2007b, str. 13; Statistični urad RS 2007, str. 30.), medtem ko terciarni sektor, zlasti turizem, ne izkorišča vseh svojih možnosti. Tako s pomočjo uresničevanja novih konceptov industrijskega turizma na Štajerskem kot tudi vinorodnega in zdraviliškega turizma s čezmejnimi ambicijami v Pomurju je mogoče govoriti o poskusih revitalizacije turizma in pospeševanja turističnega razvoja. Kljub vsemu bo prihodnost temeljila na tujih denarnih vlaganjih, intraregionalnih industrijskih dejavnostih, raziskovalni dejavnosti in čezmejnim sodelovanju. Lesna industrija in alternativni viri energije sta zgolj dva primera potencialnih, v prihodnost usmerjenih povezovalnih področij ali celo sodelovanja. Že Bojnec (Bojnec 2005: 201.) ugotavlja: »Delež storitvenega sektorja v gospodarstvu ima odločilen vpliv na nivo registrirane brezposelnosti. Negativni vpliv temelji na zvezi med deležem registrirane brezposelnosti in deležem industrije v gospodarstvu. Registrirani deleži brezposelnosti so

večji v regijah z manjšim deležem industrije in večjim deležem kmetijstva. Precejšnje ekonomske razlike med vzhodnim, zahodnim in osrednjim delom Slovenije (osrednjeslovenski del) narekujejo potrebo po subregionalnih, natančneje strukturnih in ruralnih razvojnih politikah, skladnih s smernicami Evropske unije.«

Če, hkrati z uspešno omejitvijo brezposelnosti, ne bo moderniziran kmetijski sektor v smislu uvajanja novih, visokokvalitetnih izdelkov, regiji ne bosta uspešni pri ustavljanju izseljevanja in trendov staranja prebivalstva. V zvezi s tem velja izpostaviti nezadovoljeno potrebo po bioloških ali visokokvalitetnih izdelkih, ki bi jih lahko učinkovito uskladili z razvojnimi smernicami podeželskega turizma. Primere dobre prakse najdemo tako v »štajerski Vulkanski pokrajini« kakor tudi v »bioregiji Murau«.

Regija Zahodna Zgornja Štajerska je v boju zoper negativne trende zadnjih desetletij uvedla vrsto projektov, ki jih deloma financira Evropska unija. V prispevku so predstavljeni izbrani projekti, kot so problemsko orientiran »Demografski« projekt ter izobraževalni in turistični projekti, kot sta LIFE (financiran s strani istoimenskega finančnega sklada Evropske unije, ki podpira okoljske in okoljevarstvene projekte) in RISE. Da nenehno sproža nove impulze, je regija dokazala z uvedbo tekmovalnega projekta v Spielbergu, ki ga financira Red Bull, in akademskega izobraževalnega programa v sodelovanju z graško Univerzo Karla-Franza. Namen teh iniciativ je podoben: uporaba potencialov, ki so bodisi delovno motivirani ali pa prispevajo k izboljšanju regijske podobe, v namene regionalnega razvoja.

Očitno so največji izziv demografske spremembe, ki jih je potrebno premagati, preden pomanjkanje človeških virov onemogoči ekonomski napredek. Zadnjih nekaj desetletij lahko v obeh regijah opazujemo neprostovoljno izseljevanje strokovno usposobljene in akademsko izobražene populacije v večja mesta zunaj regij. Tukaj tiči bistvo začaranega kroga: z zaposlitvijo povezana migracija visokokvalificiranih delavcev zaradi pomanjkanja zaposlitvenih možnosti, gospodarska kriza pa je posledica nizkocenovne industrije. Upajmo, da bosta kot glavna nosilca bodočega regijskega razvoja uspešni industrijski in raziskovalni podjetniški mreži Wood Cluster Styria in poslovni center Aiz v Zeltwegu.