
Collection of good practices for growth and shrinking strategies

Summary

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Background

As part of its 2021/2022 mandate, the Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development Working Group contributed to the Alpine Climate Target System. This collection implements Step 1b of the Spatial Planning Implementation Pathway 1 “Alpine wide concept “Spatial Planning for Climate Action”” in the form of collection of good practices for growth and shrinking strategies.

The purpose of this collection is to serve as a basis for the moderated discussion in the next step of the implementation pathway. The issue of climate-sensitive growth and shrinking is one additional aspect to be considered in the discussion on sustainable spatial development and closely connected to the issue of quality of life (QoL), e.g. in regard to public transport or services of general interest.

Results

Strategies

The screening of spatial planning strategies shows that shrinking is directly addressed only in a few of these documents. One is the « Strategies for regions with population decline » of the Austrian Spatial Planning Commission (ÖROK). These strategies were developed in the

framework of an implementation partnership of the Austrian Spatial Planning Concept (ÖREK) (2016-2018). The following three theses concerning spatial planning were identified: (1) The redimensioning of infrastructure (expansion and deconstruction) is important. (2) The instruments of spatial planning and land use planning must be adapted to deconstruction. (3) Architecture and building culture should be used as impulse generators.

Germany developed strategies for shrinking in the context of significant population declines in the 1990s in some regions of eastern Germany. In 2020 the German Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community published a guideline for municipalities on how to handle a strategic retreat of settlements based on experiences gathered in a demonstration project. Spatial planning in Bavaria is aware of the coexistence of growth and shrinkage (in terms of population) and tries to achieve equal living and working conditions by supporting regions at risk. As total population in Bavaria is still growing, the aim is to more evenly distribute the population across the various sub-regions.

In Italy a national strategy « Inner Areas » (72 areas, including parts of the Italian Alps) addresses the issue of declining population in some regions. The strategy aims to counteract massive population decline by capitalising on natural and cultural resources and creating new employment.

Good practices

The collection of good practice examples how regions or municipalities address growth and shrinking in the context of climate change was structured in four different types:

Spatial planning for adaptation to climate change

Adaptations to climate change include approaches of incorporating green and blue infrastructure in spatial planning (Styria), zoning of agricultural priority and green zones in spatial planning (e.g. Tyrol), strategies for risk-based planning (CH), urban climate adaptation strategies (Lucerne) and safeguarding of areas for cold air / fresh air production.

Adaptation to a shrinking population, reduction of land take and inner-urban development

One of the few examples how to address population decline through spatial planning is the Austrian region of Eisenerz. Other approaches address re-uses or conversion of existing buildings, multigenerational living, secondary homes, taxes and regulations as well as decision-making tools.

Climate change-responsible growth

Growth-oriented approaches include provisions for energy-efficient development projects (2000-Watt neighborhoods, BONSAI!), regulations to prevent urban heat as well as to limit urban zoning and financial instruments for public investments.

Withdrawal from danger zones (which may grow due to climate change)

Withdrawal from danger zones is detached from the question of growing or shrinking processes. Nonetheless can they also be used to consolidate and increase efficiency of settlement structures. Resettlement examples include areas of flood, avalanche and debris flow risks.

Conclusion

To sum up, spatial planning related responses to population decline mainly focus on initiating a “rebound” instead of managing these processes. The above mentioned three ÖREK theses can initiate the discussion about shaping change with adequate spatial planning instruments.

In shrinking processes, climate-sensitive spatial development can be integrated through a planned retreat and consolidation of settlement structures that reduce mobility and housing-related emissions and provide opportunities for inner-urban greening. Shrinking may play an important role when approaching net-zero land-take. These regions may compensate land-take in growing regions.

In growth processes, climate-sensitive spatial development can be supported through energy- and land efficient urban development, densification and multi-functional land uses.