



Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)
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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

RURBANCE project

Metropolitan Area of Styria, Austria

1. Brief Description

RURBANCE (*Rural-Urban inclusive governance strategies and tools for the sustainable development of deeply transforming Alpine territories*) is a cooperative project of the Alpine Space Programme (ASP), which lasted from 2012 to 2015 and focused on city-regions and urban-rural interactions in the Alpine area. This mountainous area is characterised by diverse landscape features with a particularly sensitive human-nature relationship and hence faces a broad range of challenges. While the city centres within the mountain range or at the edge of it are vibrant and growing, many rural and remote mountainous areas are confronted with problems like ongoing out-migration and an ageing population. The ecological challenges in the Alpine space are particularly important, and characterised by a loss of biodiversity, landscape degradation and increasing pressure on the use of natural endowments. The goal of RURBANCE was to improve the efficiency and sustainable use of the rural-urban structures by addressing the above-mentioned challenges in the main city-regions of the Alps. The international project partners built through their transnational network a research platform to analyse spatial challenges, exchange knowledge and compare promising solutions for the environmental, social and economic problems. Rural and urban communities are seen as part of one “territorial system” instead of separated areas (ASP 2013).

The project selected eight case study regions in the Alpine area, all with a core urban centre and linkages to its rural surroundings. The focus for the city of Graz and its surrounding municipalities was to develop the local transport network. The aim was to improve the connections between rural and urban areas and especially, to improve the linkage between the city and the nearby recreational areas. The project created many positive incentives in the region, so that new and innovative ideas were taken forward in cooperation with the municipalities. One significant result was the establishment of a hailed shared taxi system.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

The main objective of RURBANCE was to develop collaborative and integrated governance models to improve the cooperation between rural and urban areas. This cooperation is

necessary to achieve the “Joint Development Strategy” that aims at reappreciating the various functions within the rural-urban regions and preserving the economic, social, environmental and cultural heritage. This approach started from the premise that rural/mountain and urban communities become “equal players” in an inclusive decision-making process.

In order to find a balanced model of economic development and quality of life for these case study regions, combining the dynamic of the metropolitan areas with the natural attractiveness and know-how of rural and mountainous areas, following questions were central (ASP 2015a):

- > How to conceive a common territorial development vision where all the regions are creators of value (economic, social, cultural, environmental)?
- > How to create economic co-development by balancing the functional relationship among territories, by preserving natural resources and by providing an efficient and sustainable mobility?
- > How to aggregate public and private stakeholders around a co-development model?

In six alpine countries and in eight case study regions, 13 project partners worked within the RURBANCE project to find answers to the above questions. The urban-rural metropolitan areas of Graz, Grenoble, Ljubljana, Milan, Munich, Turin, Verona and Zurich analysed the potentials and challenges of urban-rural cooperation and developed new governance models and strategies to overcome differences and to strengthen urban-rural relations (ASP 2015a, 6).

In the Metropolitan Area of Styria, a particular focus was set on an area in the north of the city of Graz, which is characterised by an abrupt change from urban to rural structures (ASP 2015a, 36). The thematic focus there was on mobility and public transport connections between the urban region of Graz and the nearby recreation areas.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

The RURBANCE project is oriented at reducing economic, social, cultural and regional disparities between and within the case study regions in the Alps (ASP 2015a, 10). The Alpine area is composed of five European countries (Austria, France, Germany, Italy and Slovenia) and two non-European countries (Lichtenstein and Switzerland) while the former is not part of the project. With the high diversity of these countries comes a great variety of governance systems and traditions (ASP 2015a, 55).

Moreover, the RURBANCE project contributes to the macro-regional strategy for the Alpine area by focusing on an urban-rural perspective in a transnational cooperation. Therefore, one part of the project was mapping the Alpine area, which constitutes the largest economic hub, in relation to other macro-regions, programme areas and development hubs in Europe. Moreover, the Alpine area was visualised within the network of the largest

cities and the network of rural-urban regions in and around the Alps. Another important analysis of the project is the mobility network of the Alpine area with its main private and public transport infrastructure connections (City of Graz 2015, 4ff.). In addition, regional maps were produced, representing the participating Alpine case study regions. These maps illustrate actual portraits of different regional characteristics, current trends, and future visions of the case study regions, and were created for, during and with the analysis of stakeholder involvement (ASP 2015a, 20). This process was crucial to identify the potential synergy between urban and rural areas and define development measures.

In the Alpine area, the metropolitan areas play, together with their surrounding municipalities, an important role in realising and promoting innovative ideas and concepts (c.f. Bocco and Zeppetella 2011). The existing knowledge in the network of the urban-rural regions in the Alps should therefore be used to develop sustainable interventions in natural areas. At this point, the crucial responsibility of metropolitan and urban areas neighbouring mountains is to drive the efforts towards a higher awareness of environmental issues and resource management in the Alpine area (ASP 2015a, 2). Thus, the RURBANCE project partners identified eight “rurban” case study regions, which are regions of interface between core urban centres and rural areas.

Within the RURBANCE project the focus in the Metropolitan Area of Styria has been set on one local recreation area in the north of Graz. The Metropolitan Area of Styria is characterised by a dynamic development. The city of Graz and communities along important traffic corridors have increasing populations. This demographic development leads to problems with inner city traffic congestion, as well as an increase in commuter traffic. The implementation of the city-suburban express service strengthened the municipalities along this public transport network, but the municipalities not in the catchment area of this means of transport, are further disadvantaged. In order to make these communities more attractive, they are often marketed as local recreation areas for city dwellers. There is a very high potential to improve public transport for leisure purposes in order to connect the city of Graz to these areas.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

One of the objectives of the RURBANCE project was to define the “Joint Development Strategy” in each of the eight case study regions. The strategy basically stands for balanced urban-rural development and is aligned to local characteristics and existing socio-economic conditions. It consists of five main principles: (i) Sharing of costs, (ii) sharing of benefits, (iii) sharing of risks, (iv) common ownership of resources and (v) participatory decision-making.

The local representatives of the case study regions identified, together with the RURBANCE partners, pilot actions with an integrated approach. Moreover, this process should help to create a useful basis for reorienting future territorial development policies. The aim was to demonstrate how alternative visions of the territory could be created by combining the interests and development objectives of both the urban and rural areas. The focus of one

of the following three types of policy were a requirement for all pilot actions implemented in the RURBANCE project (ASP 2015a).

- 1.) Food and rural development policies: Farmers and their representative associations were involved in Milan (IT), Grenoble (F), Ljubljana (SI) and Allgäu (D) to co-create a food policy able to meet the needs of the city by promoting local rural development.
- 2.) Sustainable mobility policies: local mobility players in Graz (AT), Zurich (CH) and Grenoble (F) collaborated on projects grounded on the belief that the urban-rural relationship becomes much more balanced the more we make use of services conceived to promote real connections between the areas.
- 3.) Inter-municipal cooperation and territorial planning: in Piedmont (IT), Venice (IT) and Ljubljana (SI), the partners developed inter-municipal cooperation methods that rely on regional planning across administrative boundaries (Regione Lombardia 2015).

The starting objective of the RURBANCE project was to identify the relevant case study region area and to conduct extensive data collection. Since the research interest of the project was to analyse the vulnerability and resilience of the case study region, an introductory characterisation of key aspects of the Metropolitan Area of Styria was performed at the outset.

The region is characterised by a comparably advantageous economic situation, with a dynamic core city and inter-related rural municipalities with recreational areas in the surrounding area. Given the growing population in the region, commuter flows and inner-city traffic has increased. In general, the overall growth of traffic volume has negative effects on the natural endowments. Therefore, improving public transport and the connections to local recreation areas are crucial. These challenges are mastered due to mandatory spatial development plans and the coordinative work of the regional assembly and the regional association. The Regional Development Agencies are the operational units and work in close cooperation with the participating municipalities. Moreover, regional mobility plans help to identify deficits and opportunities in the transport infrastructure. Another central institution in the region is the Styrian Integrated Transport Association, which is responsible for the coordination and quality control of the public transport, as well as for passenger information.

The case study region consists of municipalities in the north of the district “Graz-Umgebung” (surrounding area of Graz), the region of “Schöcklland” and parts of the “Hügelland”. Since the focus in the case study region was on mobility, a detailed description was created and the geographical and topographic structures, as well as local recreational areas, the main public transport axes and important regional public transport hubs were mapped. In particular, the goal was to analyse public transport connections for leisure and tourism. Therefore, a detailed analysis of the status-quo of the private and public transport system, of commuter flows and leisure traffic, as well as of expected travel demand for a hailed shared taxi, was conducted. The case study region is off the main public transport network and the timetables of transport services are mainly aligned to needs of pupils and

commuter timeslots. Public transport connections during the weekends are rare and the regional recreational areas are hardly accessible by public transport for weekend trips. An analysis of mobility patterns and the transport system was conducted for the whole case study region, but only a small part of it was chosen as the focus of the pilot action. Based on the collected data and the analysis, the concrete focus area was defined by the recreational area “Almenland / Teichalm”. In cooperation with representatives of municipalities and stakeholders from the Nature Park “Almenland” and tourism associations, an overview on actual and future requirements for weekend trips as well as tourists’ demand was developed (ASP 2015b, 49f.).

The Nature Park “Almenland / Teichalm” is an important local recreation area for the whole urban region of Graz. In order to foster sustainable tourism, it is crucial to secure public transport to connect the recreation areas to the city of Graz. Although the Styrian Integrated Transport Association covers a lot of public transport connections, there is still huge potential for development. In this particular case, regular public transport means, like bus services, were too expensive and inefficient. Therefore, the RURBANCE project elaborated an intercommunal project in the region of “Almenland / Teichalm” which promoted the implementation of a demand-driven and flexible transport system. A sufficient offer on public transport connections increases the attractiveness of rural communities in recreational areas for weekend trips and tourists. As representatives of municipalities have shown interest in alternative public transport services, the hailed shared taxi system was expanded to many more locations after the end of the project period of RURBANCE. In 2017 a cross-community micro-public transport offer, named GUSTmobil, was implemented in 29 of the 36 municipalities in the district of Graz-Umgebung. As a result, participating (remote) municipalities are connected much better to important services, like doctors and local suppliers, as well as to public transport nodes. Passengers can book rides via phone or app, and can reach more than 1,800 marked collection points.

In conclusion, the RURBANCE project improved the accessibility of local recreation areas by implementing a sustainable means of public transport. Its pilot initiative is a starting point for a long-term process to enhance public transport connections in the region.

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

Within the RURBANCE project the focus was on the decision-making process. The principal objective was to turn decision-making into an inclusive, equal, active and efficient process to find appropriate and sustainable ways to address the existing problems. Therefore, the partners of the RURBANCE project used a bottom-up approach starting from the local institutions, associations and enterprises in the local case study region. Furthermore, twinning sessions between regions with similar interests and the hosting region were organised to facilitate a “learning-by-doing” process. Thus, the project partners and stakeholders had an opportunity to exchange ideas and experiences on many occasions.

4. Data Sources and Indicators

Table 1 Data / Indicators for RURBANCE

Data / Indicator	Source
Visualisation of the network of large cities bordering the Alpine area	Alpine Space Programme – ASP (2015c) RURBANCE, Rural Urban Governance, Contribution to an Alpine Strategy. MAPPING THE RURAL-URBAN ALPS RURBANCE topics towards an Alpine Strategy. p. 4f.
Visualisation of the network of rural-urban regions in and around the Alps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ RURBANCE territorial system, ○ main administrative borders and related areas within Alpine Space Programme, ○ small and medium cities in the Alps and relationship with RURBANCE territorial system (qualitative analysis), ○ accessibility in the Alpine area (based on commuter rates). 	Alpine Space Programme – ASP (2015c) RURBANCE, Rural Urban Governance, Contribution to an Alpine Strategy. MAPPING THE RURAL-URBAN ALPS RURBANCE topics towards an Alpine Strategy. p. 6ff.
Visualisation of the Alpine mobility network: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ network of highways, ○ network of highspeed rail connections (existing and planned). 	Alpine Space Programme – ASP (2015c) RURBANCE, Rural Urban Governance, Contribution to an Alpine Strategy. MAPPING THE RURAL-URBAN ALPS RURBANCE topics towards an Alpine Strategy. p. 14ff.
Visualisation of the Alps as one network (multi-relational core): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the Alps' borders, ○ the Alps in connection with transnational cooperation areas, ○ the Alps in connection with transnational cooperation areas (Interreg), ○ the Alps in connection with other development hubs. 	Alpine Space Programme – ASP (2015c) RURBANCE, Rural Urban Governance, Contribution to an Alpine Strategy. MAPPING THE RURAL-URBAN ALPS RURBANCE topics towards an Alpine Strategy. p. 18ff.
The principles of the territorial agenda of the European Union	European Union (2011) Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020: Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions
Mapping the geographical and topographic structures, as well as local recreational areas, the main	Alpine Space Programme – ASP (2015b) RURBANCE, Rural Urban Governance. <i>Integrated territorial visions. Maps Collection.</i> p. 25ff.

public transport axes and important regional public transport hubs.	
Assessing quality of the public transport (quantity and quality of connections, time of travel).	König, P., Reuser, J., Freiberger, L. (2015) RURBANCE-Pilotregion. Analyse Region GU-Nord, Schöcklland, Hügelland östlich von Graz. Endbericht. p. 10ff.
Collecting expectations on travel demand potential.	König, P., Reuser, J., Freiberger, L. (2015) RURBANCE-Pilotregion. Analyse Region GU-Nord, Schöcklland, Hügelland östlich von Graz. Endbericht. p. 31ff.
Data on private and public infrastructure networks.	Amt der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung (2018) Straßennetz – Straßenverzeichnis http://www.verkehr.steiermark.at/cms/beitrag/10034486/11161403/
Recreational destinations from the local recreation server Graz & Graz-region	https://www.outdooractive.com/de/ausflugsziele/
analysis of relevant destinations, the geographical distribution, thematic concentrations and the current accessibility by public transport means	König, P., Reuser, J., Freiberger, L. (2015) RURBANCE-Pilotregion. Analyse Region GU-Nord, Schöcklland, Hügelland östlich von Graz. Endbericht. p. 27ff.
Data on commuter flows	Kammer für Arbeiter und Angestellte Steiermark (Chamber of Labour Styria)
Statistical data of overnight stays and arrivals on municipality level.	Amt der Steiermärkischen Landesregierung (2018) Tourismusstatistik. https://www.verwaltung.steiermark.at/cms/ziel/117401915/DE/ Statistik Austria (2018) Ankünfte, Nächtigungen. www.statistikautonia.at

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

The integration of the Metropolitan Area of Styria in the Alpine area and the visualisation of the relation to the other rural-urban metropolitan regions provide an important tool of comparison. Especially informative is the visualisation of the economic, ecological, social and cultural relationships of the other rural-urban regions. Producing maps and a description of the areas of interest for each partner region, as well as their integration in the network of the Alpine area, encouraged a reflection process about the position of each rural-urban region. Therefore, the maps help clarify the characteristics of the Metropolitan Area of Styria, its current trends and visions and the opportunities how to effectively shape the region. These results, especially about the rural-urban relation, provide fundamental knowledge, not only for the ROBUST project, but for all future projects in the Metropolitan Area of Styria.

The knowledge and experience gained from the project participation are highly beneficial for further development of regional decision-making processes. Enhancing mobility systems in other parts of the Metropolitan Area of Styria facing similar demographic and structural challenges can be promoted. Thanks to the data collected in the RURBANCE case study area, deficits in public transport have been analysed and potentials for further development were

identified. In order to reach a balanced development of the whole area of the region, analyses in other surrounding areas of Graz are intended. Therefore, similar development processes in existing municipal cooperation could be initiated.

6. References

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