

Demographic Change in the Alps: population, employment, education and services. Presentation of the Fifth Report on the State of the Alps.

Brussels – Committee of the Regions

10 February 2016

Information Note

The presentation of the Fifth Report on the State of the Alps on demographic change took place last 10th of February 2016 at the Committee of the Regions in Brussels, the Report has been prepared in the framework of the programme of the Italian Presidency of the Alpine Convention 2013 - 2014 and recently brought to the press by the Permanent Secretariat.

Through the analysis of demographic changes occurring in the Alps and the main socio-economic phenomena that affect them, the document aims at contributing to the implementation of the Declaration Population and Culture, by which in 2006 the Contracting Parties of the Alpine Convention stressed the need to preserve the presence of the population in the Alpine region and maintain the unique characteristics of the man-made mountain environment as it is the Alpine one.



The speakers participating to the meeting, from left to right: Luca Cetara, Saverio Gazzelloni, on. Herbert Dorfmann, on. Raffaele Cattaneo, Paolo Angelini and Maior Giacomo Lombardo.

The Report was approved by decision of the Ministers of the Alpine Countries gathered in Turin at the **Thirteenth Alpine Conference (November 2014)**, they also invited the Parties and the Secretariat to engage in the dissemination of the publication toward all the interested stakeholders. In this sense, the meeting of Brussels was the occasion to present the publication to European Institutions and to the delegates of local and regional authorities present in that day also to attend the Plenary Assembly of the Committee of the Regions.

The meeting has been moderated by the head of the **Italian Delegation to the Alpine Convention**, Paolo Angelini, from the Italian Ministry of Environment, that thanked the international group of experts that oversaw the collection, the analysis and the comparison of data, updated and detailed up to the municipal level, as well as the **Italian Institute for Statistics (ISTAT)** that, through the work of **Saverio Gazzelloni**, coordinated the drafting of the document.

Great appreciation for the contents and scope of the publication has been recognized by guests attending the meeting.

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Raffaele Cattaneo, President of the Lombardy Regional Council and the Commission for Territorial Cohesion of the CoR, wanted to highlight the importance of having direct elements of knowledge, like these provided by the Report, in order to implement effective policies for the Alpine region.

By highlighting how the culture of living in the high lands belongs to the Alpine heritage more than to any other mountain areas, Cattaneo spoke of the metaphorical value of the Alps, a meeting spot for different populations and cultures and a paradigm for a Europe that can and must reinforce its communion.

Concluding his speech, he wanted to emphasize two very important issues that clearly emerge from the report: on one hand the need to ensure access to the territory, an issue that is echoed also in the pillars of the European macro regional strategy for the Alpine region (EUSALP), on the other hand the need for a careful reflection on the motivations that lead many, especially young people, to give up the mountain in search of better working and social opportunities.

Following, **MEP Herbert Dorfmann, member of the Commission for Agriculture and Rural Development and the European Parliament Intergroup for rural, mountain and remote areas**, wanted to highlight how the study scientifically highlights the main perceptions raising from people living the mountain.



Dorfmann stated that the lack of homogeneity between alpine territories, as highlighted by the analyses contained in the report, has to be attributed more to the political decisions than to causes of geographical nature. Politics should have adequate knowledge of the appropriate actions to be implemented in order to support a young person or a family to live in the mountains.

In particular, Dorfmann highlighted the centrality of three aspects: the economic one, the social one, and that one related to accessibility.

From an economic point of view, he emphasized the role of agriculture that creates links with the territory and prepares the ground for other economic activities (like tourism), among mountain areas the more densely populated are those where high-quality agriculture plays a central role within the economic backgrounds.

In this sense, a clear support to a modern mountain farming it is of strategic importance, this support should come also from the European level, by working, for example, on the Common Agricultural Policy 2014-2020, that still pays too little attention to mountain farmers, especially in its first pillar on direct payments.

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From a social point of view, Dorfmann stressed the need to restore infrastructure where they are old, although this is extremely difficult once they are been lost. A final reflection was made on the importance for policies and financial decisions to come from territory, highlighting how EUSALP can play an important role in this sense.

During the meeting, some space has been devoted also to the presentation of direct experiences coming from representatives of local authorities, that daily work to counter the abandonment of the territory.



Giacomo Lombardo, Mayor of Ostana (1400 m. above sea level), addressed the audience with a detailed report on the work done to revive this little centre of Occitan culture and tradition and to contrast the abandonment of the territory derived from migration movements toward cities.

To bring back old and new citizens in Ostana it was possible thanks through the provision of services, the enhancement of local culture (every year in Ostana a

beautiful festival for minority languages and cultures is promoted) and the activation of jobs (again, especially in the agricultural sector), these results have been recently showed by the reversal of demographic trends in the territory, as highlighted by the birth, after more than thirty years, of the first "made in Ostana" child.

The mayor did not miss to point out the difficulties of this process, often resulting from the lack of adequate attention to the territory, especially to the provision of services (the nearest hospital is located over 50 km from the village) and to the identification of rules that can facilitate the requalification; for example the lack of legislation that could regulate and combat the excessive fragmentation of property, thus the inability to activate new jobs in the agricultural and forestry sector.

Then **Saverio Gazzelloni** offered a complete overview of the contents of the report by presenting the comparison of data concerning demographic and employment trends in the Alps and using the cartographic maps improved by EURAC Research of Bolzano.

Gazzelloni highlighted how the report is proposed as a useful tool for policy makers in identifying measures and good practices to influence the demographic changes and so ensuring the return of man to the highlands.

To obtain it, the Report proposes the analysis of some important socio-economic phenomena, such as, for example, the aging of the resident population, which implies the need to rethink public services and welfare to be supplied to the territory, or the consistency of recent new migration

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flows, which in some areas offset the negative demographic balance but at the same time envisage the need to think integration processes for these "new mountain people".

In conclusion of the meeting, further attention was paid to the issues related to the need for accessibility in mountains, to that effect **Luca Cetara, from the European Academy of Bolzano**, presented the "Alpine Digital Agenda", prepared in framework of the Italian Presidency of the Alpine Convention and recently published by the Permanent Secretariat.



Starting from the objectives identified by the European digital agenda and by the digital agendas of the Convention's member Countries, the document aims to identify priorities for digitization of services in mountain areas to be guaranteed to the population, such as digital procedures in public administration, telemedicine or training and online education.

Structurally characterized by difficulties in the access to digital services, as evidenced by the gap of penetration of the broadband to municipalities over 800 meters above sea level, mountain areas deserve a specific reflection for the definition of common priorities and objectives for enhancing the value of local resources starting from the needs defined by those living in there, the Alpine Digital Agenda, flanked by the analysis of demographic trends, aims at facilitating this reflection.

Agenda of the meeting

Interventions:

- Raffaele Cattaneo, President of the Lombardy Regional Council and President of the CoR COTER Commission
- Herbert Dorfmann, Intergroup of the European Parliament on Rural, Mountainous and Remote Areas
- Markus Reiterer, General Secretary of the Alpine Convention
- Saverio Gazzelloni, Italian National Institute for Statistic
- Giacomo Lombardo, Major of Oстана
- Luca Cetara, Eurac Research –Italian Delegation of the Alpine Convention

Moderator: Paolo Angelini, Head of the Italian Delegation of the Alpine Convention -Italian Ministry of Environment Land and Sea

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