



'Local endogenous development and urban regeneration of small alpine towns'

**Project Final Conference**

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**PrA' CATINAT – FENESTRELLE - TORINO**

## **WORKPACKAGE 7**

# **URBAN ENVIRONMENT**

***DRAFT OF THE FINAL PRESENTATION OF THE WP CO-ORDINATOR***



## 1. Introduction

The first aim of this WP was to promote integrated development processes which enhance the sense of belonging the community has for its territory. Another aim was also to have a better understanding of environmental and social factors which can promote success (or failure) of development projects in marginal mountain areas. This result should be obtained by the quality improvement (under environmental, social, economic and cultural points of view) of the urban environment, not only recovering public and private real estate (with historical/architectural value), but also redesigning the “urban spaces” and increasing the inhabitants’ participation in order to maintain the local identity of the small alpine villages. These themes, like sense of belonging as action lever for local development, are not new in the alpine context. What is new is the network organization and functioning of different local experiences of this framework.

The activities which were carried out at local level under this WP arise from the awareness that while many economic production functions and factors (technology, information etc) can be found all around the globe, other assets, such as unique mountain amenities, natural environment, landscapes and local culture, must be experienced only on the spot and that this peculiarity represents one of the most important resources and potentialities of the alpine areas and has to be preserved and exploited for the local development. Furthermore an integrated and multidisciplinary approach and cooperation among different sectors is the right (and maybe the only) way to succeed in this challenge .

## 2. AlpCity Project Overview: WP 7– “Urban Environment”

There were 8 pilot cases in this Work Package and the partners who expressed an interest and investigated local partnerships to undertake project-cases on “urban environment” issues, are:

- Region of Friuli Venezia Giulia/Italy (that carried out two pilot cases on possible economic development connected with the environmental certification and recovery of abandoned areas);
- Region of Piedmont/Italy (that carried out two pilot cases on recovering Old/traditional/abandoned villages)
- Region of Veneto/Italy (that carried out one pilot case on a similar issue of Piedmont);
- Region of Franche-Comté/France (that carried out two pilot cases on creating general guidelines for the common and shared improvement and touristy exploitation of historical/traditional/natural and environmental resources by the side of the Axe Jura and setting up the network of "villes de caractère")
- Municipality of Grainau/Germany (that carried out one pilot case on improving local aspects of their village as better traffic routes/town centre renewal/creation of a new industrial/business site) .

Each partner coordinated his own case, ensured the trans-national interest and regularly report at meetings. General guidance was devised and disseminated.

These 8 projects have tried to find a way to enhance the local identity of the mountain small towns and villages by maintaining their cultural, historical, natural and environmental heritage which is perceived as the main development opportunity and resource to be exploited. The partners involved have understood that the best way to achieve their goal is

to promote networking and participatory processes, involving people and local actors in order to build consensus and interest.

If the maintenance and enhancing of the sense of belonging can be considered the red line which links these project cases under a common spatial development vision, the recovery and the improvement of the urban environment by preserving the architectural peculiarities of the historical/traditional real estate of the villages involved as well as the exploitation of the environmental, landscape and natural heritage have to be considered as some of the main tools to be used for reaching the expected result.

### **3. Common aspects**

As for the common aspects, the red lines that link the pilot cases of this WP, it could be said that there are two aspects we can find in each pilot case:

- the effort to increase local awareness and local identity by supporting and enhancing the cultural heritage of the territories involved;
- the effort to improve the local building capacity which also includes the improvement of the local actors' capacity in finding new financial sources (e.g. to learn how they can apply for EU programming tools).

The enhanced value of local identity is presented in the majority of projects like the key element which influence revitalization of small alpine towns.

Then, there is a general aim in each pilot case, which can be very evident or come out in perspective, but it is always present, that is, tourism: maybe we can say that improving and enhancing the potential for tourism in the areas involved is the main idea, the common theme we can find in most of the pilot cases of WP7. In other words tourism is perceived and seen as the main economical lever.

Other common aspects that link the pilot cases are the following:

- improvement of the quality of the process;
- set up of efficient networking and collaboration among local actors to integrate and enhance local initiatives;
- the significance of long-term projects;
- the perception of the environmental and historical heritage as a resource for economic development;
- the need, from a methodological point of view, of a participatory process;
- the positive role of external experts and consultants.

### **4. Methodology**

A reflection could be lead about projects aim. Thus it could be possible to identify some differences between projects. For example between "Jura axis" project which principal aim is to promote and enhance image of the mountain territories and the other projects where many actions are developed which affect indirectly this image and this sense of belonging (like rehabilitation ...).

However all projects have a common point: the enhanced value of the sense of belonging by the enhanced value of the heritage (historical, cultural, environmental). In practical terms, it is by the creation of added value in term of services in valleys, villages, hamlets that those enhanced values are developed. Two kinds of strategies emerge:

a) Strategies of image enhanced (territorial certification, cultural promotion ...) via the creation of tools, like agreements, conventions concerning the construction of a new identity to be spread outside to enhanced the attractiveness of those peripheral regions

b) Strategies and products which aim at “good practices” (with guidelines) in term of rules or opportunities (i.e. sustainable renovation of heritage build-up).

## **5. Final considerations**

To get best results not only within the AlpCity Project but also to establish a basis for further activities it is very important to promote the exchange of lessons learned and the exchange of problems faced during the implementation of the pilot cases. This is not only a major aspect of the trans-national approach of the Interreg IIIB Alpine Space Programme but also the most efficient and effective way for every single small alpine town to obtain information about how to face a special “small-alpine-town-problem”. Of course the transferability of the experiences may vary from country to country due to different political and administrative structures (also social, economical and cultural contexts of each case are important in this sense), but the individual approach about how to find solutions definitely can be shared and at least partially adopted.