contact person: scolozzi@skopia-anticipation.it; rocco.scolozzi@unitn.it

Key Thematic Question- Means and methods for making the future accessible?

Reopening futures of remote, depopulating Alpine areas – the pilot project ALPJOBS

Rocco Scolozzi[a,b], Gian Antonio Battistel[c], Alessandro Gretter[c], Antonio Furlanetto[a], Roberto Poli[a,b]

[a] -skopìa srl Anticipation Services, Trento, Italy
[b] Department of Sociology and Social Research, University of Trento, Trento, Italy
[c] Fondazione Edmund Mach, San Michele all'Adige (Trento), Italy

Strong imbalances in terms of job opportunities and supplied services are common issues across the EUSALP regions; where in the Alpine more remote areas such issues are amplified by the decline of population. A relevant part of the systemic problem are the young people (15-34 years) which generally go out of their villages for higher education or job and do not come back to ("brain drain").

The pilot project ALPJOBS (2018-2020, funded by the Alpine Region Preparatory Action Fund, ARPAF) aims to contribute to initiatives against depopulation in remote alpine areas focusing on future job opportunities and on social processes that can support (or hamper) them. The five project partners, from Italy, Slovenia, Austria and Switzerland, by using the selected methods derived from Futures Studies, try to answer to following open questions:

- how to involve young, entrepreneurs, labor agencies, local policy makers and interest groups in developing sustainable innovations of the local social economic system;
- how formal and/or non-formal and/or informal education system and vocational training centres could foster competences fitting to possible future conditions (2030) in regional enterprises and job seekers;
- how to promote the anticipatory governance in establishing and maintaining attractive job opportunities, as well as enhance the resilience of local communities.

The pilot project is intended as a learning and testing experience for stakeholders without prior knowledge of future studies, with expected results at different levels in terms of:

- spread of competences in stakeholders and agents of change in Alpine remote areas on adaptation to the coming changes or orientation of local opportunities for the labor market and innovation;
- collection of insights and strategic indications for possible future-proof projects of local development in collaboration with the local communities;
- fostering the awareness of entrepreneurial and social actors on the importance of involving young people and building strategies for local development, looking at the medium-long term and the related uncertainties.

ALPJOBS project consists of training modules for partners on methods from future studies, and applications of these by the same partners in their territory. The chosen methods aimed at providing to learners an overview of methods of different difficulty, as well as at allowing them to collect a series of strategic information and insights useful for subsequent more operational developments.

In the first phase, the partners collected a series of socio-economic statistics to understand the territorial dynamics (local trends) and to recognize the coming changes (megatrends). Subsequently, they conducted several "strategic interviews" to identify the fears and hopes of relevant local actors concerning the futures of their community. These expectations, associated with their motivations, influence their ability to visualize their desirable futures and converge their efforts towards long-term strategies. At the end of the first phase, the partners developed a quadrant of strategic scenarios, inspired to the "Shell method" (based on two axes of uncertainty).

In the second phase, the partners identified the local territorial sub-systems and the processes most capable to sustain (or hamper) innovation and job opportunities, using a tailored procedure of participatory modelling within the systems thinking paradigm. In the same, they listed the "local treasures", or local capitals, including both the tangible and intangibles ones. These processes and local capitals will form the basis for any local development strategy.

In a third phase, the partners were introduced to backcasting and road mapping methods and applied these with local stakeholders, resulting in a set of strategic points to further develop. The roadmapping was

performed using an original tailored template, considering different sub-systems, such as: Education, Community, Job market, Technology (locally available), Resources, along five time-horizons (past, present, 1 - 3 – 10 years).

In the last phase, the partners composed a fictitious CV of a promising young job-seeking candidate (in 2030), describing the skills deemed most suitable for local contexts in future, considering the virtuous processes, the uncertainty scenarios, the local treasures, the most favorable conditions, emerged from all previous exercises and analyzes.

The results are interesting at two levels: process and content. The development of future exercises has encouraged the project partners to embrace a way of thinking about broader time horizons, "thinking in systems" the local development and looking at long term objectives. The concepts of futures studies (such as strategic scenarios, relevant uncertainties, megatrends, feedback loops) have entered their vocabulary and that of local stakeholders involved in the applications. The partners have translated the methodological indications into the language of their stakeholders for local applications.

The contents of these applications have some limitations due to structural factors (limited time and personnel resources) as well as contingent factors (inexperience about futures studies, relatively small agency and commitment). The depth and detail of analyzes and of the "futures exercises" have a considerable room for improvement.

Nevertheless, overall, the project has allowed us to collect significant samples from different contexts of the Alpine region, including 61 strategic interviews, 10 local strategic scenarios, 7 workshops of "systems mapping", 5 workshops of backcasting, 5 workshops of roadmapping, involving locally groups of stakeholders.

Interesting information emerged from information gathered on expectations, fears, promising processes and obstacles to innovation. All these can be useful to visualize and plan favorable local conditions for the development of job opportunities for young people in the coming years.