



Anticipate Future Jobs on Alpine Remote Areas



Work package 4.2

Report on local backcasting exercise

LAG "Murau"

Author: Barbara Birli, Peter Tramberend



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1. The workshop: participants and related sub-systems

The back casting exercise has been compiled based on various interactions with the stakeholder group in Murau. Reason for this is that a reunion of all stakeholders at the same time in the same building has turned out to be impossible. These interactions and communication took place on: 01.03.2019 and 12.03.2019. The text contains also some information provided in context of the stakeholder workshop on 14.11.2018 and in personal communication in July and August 2018.

The text parts used were compiled using notes from the sessions as well as audio recordings in German language. This have been translated into English for this report.

The group tackled provides the following societal background:

- Female, Age: under 30, Local administration,
- Female, Age: around 35 Teacher,
- Female, Age: around 45 Head of home for elderly people,
- Male, Age: under 30 Student,
- Male, Age: 50 Local administration,
- Male, Age: 30 Business - Service sector,
- Male, Age: teenager at school Student at High school,
- Male, Age: 40-50 Part-time farmer and employee,
- Male, Age: around 50 Head of local unit for regional development.

2. Backcasting

Based on the interviews with different actors in Murau and the results from workshops with experts, some desirable futures for 2030 could be identified.

The “futures” focus mainly on four thematic areas:

- vocational education for young adults,
- innovative economy,
- family-friendly environment with good living conditions,
- good intercommunal cooperation.

The backcasting procedure has been implemented for all 4 areas.

3. Vocational Education

3.1. The desirable future 2030

2030, everything is going well, I can see...

- A new vocational school opened in Murau, integrating higher education and vocational training opened.
- All young adults can now choose from a wide range of tailor-made vocational training and other educational offers.
- Most of these courses are well connected with the local economy in order to ensure that graduates can stay in Murau and find employment there after graduation.

3.2. Promising conditions in 2026

The promising conditions in 2026 are:

- Development of training programmes together with local companies, for example with the Stolzalpe regional Hospital.
- In cooperation with the provincial government and the municipality of Murau, courses are offered in this medical field.
- In order to attract students from elsewhere a boarding school has been built.
- Establishment of a housing cooperative that buys houses in the town to refurbish and maintain them on sustainable basis.
- Possibility to offer affordable rents.

3.3. Possible obstacles in between 2026 and 2030

Possible obstacles in between 2026 and 2030 are:

- Low number of persons interested to work in the health sector.
- Social and health care branch is considered as poorly paid and a “female” branch.

3.4. Possible actions mitigating or preventing the obstacles

To overcome this, the following ideas were outlined:

- promoting the health sector as branch with various options,
- considering higher payment,
- promoting the health sector jobs as relatively safe.

3.5. Promising conditions in 2022

The promising conditions in 2022 for the desired 2026 are:

- A first structure and concept for the vocational school have been developed.
- A building located in the centre of Murau is available.
- Sponsors both public and private for revitalisation have been informed and are interested in funding such a project.

3.6. Possible obstacles in between 2022 and 2026

Obstacles in the period of time 2022-2026 for the desired futures are:

- It is not possible to adapt an existing building for the vocational school.
- Building outside the city centre is not what the region wants as the existing structures should be preferred compared to building “on the green fields”.

3.7. Possible actions mitigating or preventing the obstacles

To prevent this:

- Intense negotiations to find and adapt an existing (old) building to set up a vocations school helps to overcome this situation.
- Promoting the new training course.

4. Innovative local economy

4.1. The desirable future 2030

2030, everything is going well, I can see...

- ... That Murau is now a hotspot for innovative start-up-companies and offers all sorts of qualified jobs.
- “Just finished” graduates can easily find a job at local companies

4.2. Promising conditions in 2026

The promising conditions in 2026 are:

- In a joint action, the federal and provincial government decided to give rural areas the same preference as cities and therefore invested in different types of infrastructure.
- In 2026, broadband internet is available in all districts of the Murau region.
- Due to the improved infrastructure in the area of roads and the Internet, it is now possible to better promote local food production and to foster marketing and distribution.
- Through the cooperation and clustering of production and services, a timber industry has a supra-regional impact.

4.3. Possible obstacles in between 2026 and 2030

Obstacles in 2026 for the desired 2030 are:

- The manufacturing sector suffers from low innovative strength and is characterized with lacking connection to supra-regional innovation facilities.
- In general, the exchange of knowledge at regional level is still limited and knowledge gaps are considerable.
- The low number of employees with training in the energy sector; a consequence of the brain drain in this sector towards large cities.

4.4. Possible actions mitigating or preventing the obstacles

To overcome this, the following ideas were outlined:

- The local and provincial government to foster innovation and communication among entrepreneurs by providing grants for innovation activities and by investing in infrastructure and platforms for communication.
- Foster local facilities such as energy or timber production among investors outside the region, even outside Austria.
- Promote jobs at local companies to reduce brain drain.

4.5. Promising conditions in 2022

The promising conditions in 2022 are:

- In 2022 the new energy strategy has been implemented.
- The region is energy self-sufficient and to some extent exports energy.
- Shift of the general focus from the production towards the service sector.
- The service to customers has been improved.

- Training of young people in setting up their own businesses and the support for creating a network among young entrepreneurs has been improved.

4.6. Possible obstacles in between 2022 and 2026

Obstacles in the period of time 2022-2026 for the desired futures are:

- Inhabitants born 1956 to 1969 will retire in this period of time, thus losing a large number of people to the labour market. The number of non-active persons over 65 increases considerably, from 250,500 in 2017 to 322,500 in 2030.
- employers looking for staff have problems to find employees.

4.7. Possible actions mitigating or preventing the obstacles

To overcome this, the following ideas were outlined:

- In order to prepare students better for their future careers apprenticeship and other forms of educational courses in schools are promoted.
- Fairs and reunions from the perspective of employers are organised to provide a platform for employers to get to know potential employees and for graduates to get in contact with interested firms.
- A combined education of secondary degree and apprenticeship (Lehre mit Matura) might convince sceptical citizens.

5. Family friendly environment and better living conditions

5.1. The desirable future 2030

2030, everything is going well, I can see...

... that the municipality of Murau and all local companies established family programmes where parents can easily combine their working life with the daily family duties, such as child care at companies, old age care centres, etc.

5.2. Promising conditions in 2026

The promising conditions in 2026 are:

- A fair housing market offers flats and houses which are affordable to buy or to rent. This offers also for young families and in particular for people coming from abroad to easily find a suitable place to live.
- The housing market offers not only large family houses but also small newly refurbished flats.
- A cooperative has been founded with the aim of converting privately owned houses into “ready for the market” houses and flats (support for conversion).
- In case house owners provide studios and living space to creative artists, public funds are available.
- Murau to become an attractive and culturally vibrant place for the locals and tourists.
- To enable a combination of family life and work life, full day high quality child care is offered.
- Full day care taking for elder people is available.
- Ideally these two centres are situated in the same building and offer joint programmes both for the kids and for the elderly.

5.3. Possible obstacles in between 2026 and 2030

Obstacles in the period of time 2022-2026 for the desired futures are:

- Lack of funding for creative and artistic performances.
- Lack of funding for kindergartens, all day schools and retirement homes.
- Low demand, low social acceptance to have kids in the kindergarten not only during the morning but also in the afternoon.
- General politics do not focus on rural areas such as Murau.

5.4. Possible actions mitigating or preventing the obstacles

To overcome this, the following ideas were outlined:

- Providing information on best practice examples from other comparable remote areas.
- Best practice examples to be distributed in local newspapers to convince sceptical families.
- Quality insurance to ensure the very good afternoon offer.
- To overcome financial problems of artists applications to support creative persons in the region, for example through LEADER funds.

5.5. Promising conditions in 2022

The promising conditions 2022 are:

- Underground car park at the main square offers parking space in the centre.
- Using the space at the main square for a market, fairs and social offers.
- broad touristic potential and attractiveness along the Mur river for cycling, water sports, running/movement attract tourists.
- Short transport routes and good public transport enable easy links to mountain areas, both in summer and in winter.

5.6. Possible obstacles in between 2022 and 2026

Obstacles in the period of time 2022-2026 for the desired futures are:

- The number of parking lots is too low, there are too few parking lots for residents of the inner part of Murau.
- The urban open space is too small, walking paths are not attractive or lead to long distances.
- The use of bicycles is not attractive for daily routine, public transport within the city is not attractive.
- The centre of Murau becomes deserted: shops move from the main square to the shopping centre.

5.7. Possible actions mitigating or preventing the obstacles

In order to overcome these obstacles we need:

- investments in urban open space based,
- a concept that includes traffic, urban space use and the demands of the local economy,

6. Intercommunal cooperation

6.1. The desirable future 2030

2030, everything is going well, I can see...

... that the local politicians and actors of Murau intensively interact with their counterparts in the surrounding municipalities.

6.2. Promising conditions in 2026

The promising conditions in 2026 are:

- Inter-municipal cooperation has become commonplace in the Murau region.
- All municipalities in the region have set up a joint programme for financial compensation in the region.

6.3. Possible obstacles in between 2026 and 2030

Obstacles in the period of time 2022-2026 for the desired futures are:

- Lack of knowledge among actors in the region about benefits of inter communal partnerships.
- The actors fear dispute over money and influence.

6.4. Possible actions mitigating or preventing the obstacles

To overcome this, the following ideas were outlined:

- In other regions it helped to promote intercommunal collaboration and to hire a person to manage it.

6.5. Promising conditions in 2022

The promising conditions in 2022 are:

- Intercommunal cooperation: mutual benefit has been recognised: one municipality compensates the weaknesses of others.
- also other community tasks are done jointly: Waste water, winter road maintenance and child care are organised on an inter communal level rather than on single village level.

6.6. Possible obstacles in between 2022 and 2026

Obstacles in the period of time 2022-2026 for the desired futures are:

- Dispute among the actors.
- No-one feeling responsible.

6.7. Possible actions mitigating or preventing the obstacles

To overcome this, the following ideas were outlined:

- hire professional help in form of a mediator.
- Hiring a person to manage the overall change from single communal thinking to inter communal working.

7. Learnings

For the region Murau implementation of projects is currently in focus. The LEADER office called Holzwelt is supporting AlpJobs and the Environment Agency in all their work in the region. All activities have been presented also to the reunion of the LEADER committee. In this committee there are mayors and local entrepreneurs. The feedback gained from the reunion of the LEADER committee was that they need to focus on implementation. For example the main activity in the region in the period of time was the organization of the energy camp in May 2019 and preparations for the Stubenrein initiative. (large art festival). The region has just taken all steps towards being energy self-sufficient. For some years now, the municipality has focused its regional development more on the implementation of already acquired knowledge.

However the AlpJobs project has been welcomed warmly by the Holzwelt employees and by the LEADER committee. The local citizens have provided their free time to the project as they are interested in their region.

The “thinking back” approach allows a different view on the items of discussion and thus provides new insights. The task involves thinking in a non-chronological way. Through the exercise a structured overview of all possible options and obstacles on different time scales has been compiled which is beneficial for the region.

So, despite the benefits backcasting provides Murau is currently in a phase of implementation rather than collecting data. Actually this is positive; the region has concrete plans for its futures. As backcasting supports rather data collection than implementation it did not fit ideally in the main focus of the region in early 2019.

Was the approach new to you?

The approach was new to the team and required good preparation.

What were the main difficulties in doing so?

The main difficulty was that a reunion of all local stakeholders at the same time was not possible. The main problems in using it was that there was a repetition to the interview task to a certain extend. So questions raised during the interview sessions came up again. Further to this some topics were discussed repeatedly. It was therefore helpful to define separate priority topics and to process these separately in detail.

The participants tend to concentrate on their personal concerns and not on those of the community of Murau. Some participants put their personal problems in the foreground and found it difficult to work out the more general challenges in the community.

What were the main interesting results?

The back casting method enables the group to develop visionary goals (desirable future) and link them with concrete measures and steps to achieve these goals. This method is a creative approach to combine visionary thinking with realistic and concrete measures.

It is extremely positive that the inhabitants of the Murau region have so many good ideas for their region and were willing to invest their free time into the project.

Would you be willing to use this approach?

Yes. With the insights gained re-use of the approach is very likely. Repetition of the tasks in other regions requires less preparation.

Final notes

Politics

In the region the general political tendency to invest in cities is criticized. So too the trend to implement laws and regulations that fit better for densely populated areas are outlined as negative for the region. An example is the support for kindergardens per kid.

Businesses and Workplaces

For local entrepreneurs the low internet connection is a major problem. Some business branches require fast internet and these companies need better infrastructure to compete with other companies. In particular Start-ups are dependent on this form of infrastructure.

The main local employer LKH Stolzalpe is of high importance and local inhabitants see options for extending the services. There are some positive new ideas to combine new education facilities with the existing hospital

The energy sector is seen as THE future branch and combinations of education in energy efficiency together with foundations of new firms are welcomed by the locals.

Infrastructure and mobility

Workshop participants see a huge potential using the empty buildings of the region. They admit that help is needed in particular when house owners are old. The local housing structure is focused too much on the single family house rather than on flats. A need for new housing forms is outlined. In particular combinations of “living and working” in refurbished houses is a promising approach.

Inter-municipal cooperation has been outlined as important and obviously citizens are sure that cooperation is the solution to keep services despite the lower number of inhabitants. They are aware that there need to be someone feeling responsible for this.

Education

Among the major problems of the region is obviously the need to “have to leave” the region to acquire a higher education. The education at the BORG prepares students for a university education. So at the workshop it has been outlined that a different school type is required for the region that provides good education and at the same times keeps young people in the region. Another idea was to open a boarding school to attract students from elsewhere.

Parents of the region would like to see their kids close to them, it is hard for them to choose in between “keeping the kids around” or “offering the kids a good higher education”.

Cultural and Social Identity

The role of women in the region was of high importance in the workshop. Some topics proved to be “rather affecting women’s’ life’s”, for example care taking for kids as well as for elderly.

In combination with the empty infrastructure the need for a very good kids and elderly facility has been outlined and described. If such an institution would be available women would more likely return to the region after their education. This is the case in particular when it is socially accepted, to send family members there. The social acceptance of external caretaking is seen as a crucial factor to keep women in the region.

The workshops participants are proud of their local art festivals and music festivals.