

Revitalisation and entrepreneurship for disadvantaged rural areas in Europe

Understanding the municipal interest in the topic of demography and the support of regional value creation processes in the rural structurally weak area in the district of Uckermark

The district of Uckermark is situated in a peripheral location in the north-east of Brandenburg and belongs to the very rural and sparsely populated areas of Germany. With an area of 3,077 km², it has an average population density of 38.4 inhabitants/km². The region is characterised by a further decreasing and ageing population. In various rural areas, population densities are now very low (5-10 inhabitants/km²). Only the area served by the city of Szczecin, the district's medium-sized centres (Templin, Angermünde, Schwedt and Prenzlau) as well as some municipalities along the Berlin-Szczecin transport axis are currently experiencing demographic stabilisation. During demographic change, the further development of services of general interest is of great importance throughout the Uckermark; in the rural-peripheral sub-areas it is a particular challenge. Ageing, birth deficits, migration of the active parts of the population, and the formation of a residual population are accelerating the negative population development, which is clearly below the national average. Serious consequential problems arise, among other things, for the maintenance of social services of general interest, basic services, mobility, and educational opportunities, etc., but also for civic engagement, especially in rural areas.

Starting in 2011, a broad and transparent communication process was initiated in form of a regional strategy for services of general interest, and it is called Uckermark 2030. This process revealed further problem areas in the Uckermark: Securing skilled labour, life in old age, education and care, municipal emergency response and technical infrastructure (sewage, fresh water), a low wage level, low economic strength, the presence of only a few larger companies and only a small variety of industries. In addition, there is no university or college in the district.

Possible solutions

The district development office is currently working with the region on updating the regional strategy and to examine possible solutions for their implementation.

For example, it is arguable whether the production and availability of low-cost renewable energy could be a promoting location factor for rural areas? The aim of our idea: Can, for example, cheaper energy for communities and citizens in rural-peripheral areas contribute to the following

- can alternative working and educational models emerge,
- attract SMEs that value sustainably produced regional energy,
- crowd production, co-working spaces and start-ups support local life and work and thus form the basis for
- the settlement of young people, returnees, incomers, new skilled workers from former migrants,
- can new forms of housing (multi-generation houses also in rural areas) be financed,
- therefore, creating an increase in attractiveness for young immigrants,
- strengthening the municipalities as a relief area for Berlin
- climate goals are achieved through CO₂ reduction.

Indicators for retention and attraction factors could be:

- positive effects of settlement development,
- labour market development,
- demography,
- development of social places,
- strengthening of rural areas and sustainability of communities willing to shape the future.

What factors might appear suitable to develop these further:

- Strengthening the local communities by addressing the population, the necessary involvement of the youth, but also the inclusion of those willing to integrate.
- Creation and maintenance of basic supply infrastructure outside the towns in the district.
- Ensuring the infrastructure of the kindergarten and school landscape in the district of Uckermark as an incentive to move in or return.
- Curbing gender-specific migration - e.g., through the explicit promotion of training opportunities and jobs for women in rural areas and the maintenance and qualitative expansion of infrastructure facilities, furthermore through the establishment of equal career and development opportunities as well as remuneration.
- Expansion of regional value-added potential
- By involving returnees, start-up founders as well as urban weary people and migrants, new directions of thinking can be initiated and already existing processes can be further developed. New targeting can be identified.
- Establishment of stable conditions to increase the willingness to get involved (long-term and/or project-related), strengthening the sense of community as well as the identification with the opportunities that arise locally.

Our regional strategy is updated for a structurally weak rural area.

Target groups

- Young people
- Returnees and newcomers
- People willing to start a business
- long-term unemployed
- Employees in the municipalities
- Volunteers or voluntary engagement

Transferability of the strategy

- The approaches of the regional strategy can be transferred to another region at any time, adapted to its conditions.

Objectives of the strategy

- Private commitment
- Public commitment
- Community initiatives

Participation

- Local government
- Regional administration
- Businesses
- Employers' organisations
- Civil society organisations
- Others