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ISSUE 1

WELCOMING SPACES NEWSLETTER

About WELCOMING SPACES

The WELCOMING SPACES in Europe programme brings together researchers, policy-makers, NGOs, trade unions, businesses and grassroots organizations striving for the fair, inclusive and sustainable development of shrinking European regions, while providing opportunities for the successful integration of non-EU migrants.

Editorial



By Rianne Hadders (Coordinator) & Alberto Alonso-Fradejas (Postdoc Researcher)

In the last week before the corona virus constrained our mobility, the WELCOMING SPACES spaces team came together to celebrate the start of the research project. Just in time, the researchers from Germany, Italy, Poland and Spain came to the Netherlands to discuss the programme of the four forthcoming years. The WELCOMING SPACES team looks back on an inspiring kickoff, where interesting discussions followed the presentation of the partners. Hereby, we would like to thank you all for your contributions!

However, our idea of the context for welcoming spaces then differed drastically from what the current pandemic conjuncture has to offer. Currently, the European Union does not let in any refugees, and the possibility to travel within the EU is highly restricted. No doubt this has an effect on the welcoming initiatives for both non-EU migrant newcomers and long-established residents in shrinking EU regions. These include negative implications on livelihoods, employment and public services. And the possibilities to set up or continue welcoming initiatives might decrease. On the other hand, the last weeks also showed the rise of all kinds of volunteer initiatives from people who are bound to home and want to help out. Additionally, there might be more political room for alternative revitalization paths focused on enhanced human well-being and

environmental sustainability rather than on “trickle down” economic growth at all costs. So these awkward and worrisome conjuncture might also offer opportunities to change for the best, who knows?

This is actually a question that we would like to ask you. Hereby we would like to open up an invitation: for our blog series we invite you to send in a blog on the effects of the corona crisis on shrinking areas and migration. Please share with us your thoughts, experiences and expectations and we will publish it on our website. If you don't want to write a full blog, but just want to share some ideas, including through audio-visual media (e.g. photos, videos, posters, paintings, brief podcasts, etc.), these are very welcome too! All can be send to: welcomingspaces@uu.nl

Kickoff Meeting WELCOMING SPACES

On March 6, WELCOMING SPACES organized a public event to celebrate the start of the project. The event brought together researchers, policymakers, representatives from NGOs, trade unions and businesses. Topic of discussion was: how can fair, inclusive and sustainable development of shrinking regions in Europe provide opportunities for successful integration of non-EU migrants. Each of the partners presented their countries within this context.

Context and cases of Welcoming Spaces



Prof. Dr. Sabine Meier found that "volunteer-migrant engagements" changed social life in shrinking cities in a positive sense, but couldn't overcome regulations from higher scale levels. The interplay of scalar levels is a key foundation to the welcoming spaces research.

GERMANY

In Germany, we recognise a distinction between former West and East Germany and shrinking regions with growing urban areas at the centre. As a result of the influx of newcomers in German shrinking rural areas, municipalities have experienced new socio-cultural dynamics in their communities and a new impulse for local public services.

ITALY

In different parts of Italy small villages can be found that have identified migration as an important element to fight depopulation and transformed their shrinking municipalities into welcoming spaces. We can see innovative initiatives which connect the reception and integration of newcomers with local development.



The town of Riace was one of the initiatives that received massive media attention, which eventually had unforeseen negative effects for the initiative. The case raises questions on the influence of narratives on migration and development.



The municipality of Berkelland, expected to experience population decline soon, take an active approach to support newcomers to participate in the community. For example, through workshops as shown in the picture.

THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, our first overview shows many NGO-driven, government driven and citizen driven initiatives, which are mostly found in the Dutch borderlands in Groningen, the Achterhoek and Limburg. During the conference, the mayor of the Dutch municipality Berkelland explained how they take an active approach in approaching and connecting with future newcomers of the municipality.



Partner Ocalenjie Foundation is one of the organisations welcoming migrants in Poland despite national 'unwelcoming' policies.

POLAND

In Poland, we see a clear discrepancy between the public discourse on migration and the actual situation of newcomers, who find themselves in spaces that were meant to be welcoming to migrants – welcoming initiatives – and spaces where migrants successfully have become part of a local context without explicit welcoming measures – de facto welcoming spaces.

SPAIN

In Spain, population decline has proceeded to severe forms in various areas of the country. Throughout Spain initiatives are organised to introduce nonEU migrants from overpopulated urban areas to rural regions, which are often characterised by population decline. In collaboration with municipalities and local actors, migrants who participate in these projects are welcomed by the local communities.



The project "Nuevos Senderos" of Cepaim Foundation supports migrants in shrinking areas of Spain with the specific aim to support the development of rural areas.

UPCOMING EVENTS

AUTUMN PHD SCHOOL ON MIGRATION & DEVELOPMENT 16-20 NOV 2020

For PhD researchers working on topics related to relations between flows of non-EU migrants to the EU and sustainable development in both the migrants' communities of origin and in the receiving communities in the EU. More Information about participation will be published on our website and through our newsletter soon.

LAUNCH COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

In the coming months a community of practice will be set up by the welcoming spaces team. In this community the researchers and local practitioners and other stakeholders will share insights on best practices or lessons learned.

Interested? Sign up via welcomingspaces@uu.nl

PUBLIC EVENT WELCOMING SPACES
26 MARCH 2021

On March 26th, 2021 another public meeting will take place where we will present and discuss the first findings of the research.

About this newsletter

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