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Wolfgang Pfefferkorn

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Preface:

Knowledge transfer – a new pillar for regional development?

Wolfgang Pfefferkorn

- 1 This volume of RGA presents projects and initiatives dealing with knowledge management and knowledge transfer in a regional context. In the last 30 years, knowledge has become more and more an important economic resource, a factor of production in a knowledge based society. Today, many employees in the private and public sector can be characterised as “knowledge workers”. The three key elements of knowledge management are: man, organisation and technology. The first approaches, which were mainly implemented in the private sector lead to complicated technical expert systems and to numerous data graveyards. In the last years, we can observe a renaissance of knowledge management and knowledge transfer, but under other signs: whereas the solutions of the 1990ies were rather technical, the new approaches put the human individual into the centre.
- 2 Under this new approach knowledge management and knowledge transfer are booming not only in the private sector and in administration, but also in intermediary organisations, NGO’s as well as in regional development programmes. To give some examples: The LEADER, ESPON and INTERACT initiatives of the EU have a strong focus on transnational exchange of knowledge and experience, the Swiss Government has just started to establish regional knowledge transfer as an important element of the new Swiss Regional Policy, the Austrian Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 supports the initiative of Learning Regions. A parallel initiative can be found in Germany.
- 3 Last but not least, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps – CIPRA has just completed a 3,5 years project aiming at collecting and disseminating knowledge and experiences in Alpine regions.
- 4 The articles of this RGA volume try to highlight the different aspects of knowledge transfer in regional development: The contribution of Albert Simard from Natural Resources Canada presents the theoretical background in a system- and market-oriented approach. He describes regional knowledge transfer as a value added chain of

the product “knowledge”, a system which consists of 9 different steps and which is much more complex than the simple relation between knowledge providers and users.

- 5 In their article, Roland Scherer and Klaus-Dieter Schnell describe the role of knowledge as a development resource in the new Swiss regional policy including web tools, systematic professional training and further education for regional managers, the establishment of a system for controlling, reporting and monitoring. The establishment and operation of an integral regional development knowledge system is one of the three principles of the new shall support the facilitate implementation of the other two principles: 1. strengthening innovation, value added and competitiveness as well as 2. strengthening cooperation and using synergies between the regional policy and federal sectoral policies.
- 6 In the contribution about the project “Future in the Alps”, Wolfgang Pfefferkorn and Serena Rauzi describe in two articles the aims, the approach, the structure and the results of knowledge transfer activities in the Alps, which have been carried out by CIPRA and a wide range of co-operation partners in the last 3 and a half years. Whereas the first article is focusing on the structures and methods of alpine wide knowledge transfer activities, the second article describes the outcomes and findings, the new knowledge gained in this project. Therefore, the second article is presented in the “Agenda” part of the RGA volume.
- 7 The approach of “Future in the Alps” has close links to the theoretical background presented by Albert Simard and the political and regional framework described by Roland Scherer and Klaus-Dieter Schnell.
- 8 The last article is about the Austrian Initiative on Cultural Landscape Research, which has been carried out between 1995 and 2005. This article shows, how knowledge transfer can be evaluated and put into figures through an “intellectual capital report”. Evaluating the impacts of knowledge transfer is still a new field with few experiences – therefore the Austrian approach seems to be even more interesting.
- 9 By presenting these four articles about knowledge transfer in a regional context, we’d like to draw a bow from the theoretical background presented by Albert Simard to the practical experiences gained in Future in the Alps and the political and administrative implementation of knowledge transfer in Switzerland closing with the Austrian example of evaluating knowledge transfer activities in a inter- and trans-disciplinary research programme focusing on cultural landscape change.

AUTHOR

WOLFGANG PFEFFERKORN

CIPRA International. wolfgang.pfefferkorn@cipra.org