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**Comparative structural analysis  
concerning demographic and economic developments in the  
Netherlands, Silesia (Poland) and the Bavarian Allgäu (Germany)**

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TRANSFER OF INNOVATIONS  
**BUSQUA – BUSINESS & QUALIFICATION**

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## 1 Introduction

In the long term, the demographic change will have a distinctive impact on the society, labour market and economy all over Europe. According to demographic prognosis, the share of older persons will increase (more or less) in (nearly) all European countries within the next years and decades, while the overall population will decline. As a result, a relatively small share of economically active people is accompanied by an increasing share of non-active ones. The ageing and shrinking workforce poses a challenge to all stakeholders and necessitates inter alia new concepts and ideas for (re)mobilising resources on the labour market.

One possible approach to meet this challenge is to preserve and enhance older persons' employability and to retain them thus in the labour market as long as possible. The main problem thereby is that the fields of activity older employees are working in are often too physical demanding, straining etc. – i. e. the conditions for keeping older persons active are quite unfavourable. This obvious contradiction is a point of origin for the BusQua project<sup>1</sup> which aims at qualifying older persons for working fields being age-appropriate as well as regionally and operationally prospective.

The training to be implemented within BusQua will take place in three European regions being culturally and economically quite different: Friesland (the Netherlands), Silesia (Poland) and the Bavarian Allgäu (Germany). A precondition for the conception and design of the training is to identify relevant and suitable working fields meeting the above mentioned characteristics. So it was one of the first steps within the project to accomplish a structural analysis of the particular countries respectively regions. As a result, three reports are available – analyzing the demographic and economic developments in each region in detail, giving insight in education and training in the Netherlands, Poland and Germany and proposing appropriate fields for the training of older employees within the BusQua project.

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<sup>1</sup> BusQua is a project financed within the Leonardo da Vinci programm "Transfer of Innovations". It is executed by a project team consisting of partners from the Netherlands, Poland and Germany within the project term from 29<sup>th</sup> September 2008 to 28<sup>th</sup> September 2010. More information can be found on <http://www.uni-erfurt.de/wbeb/busqua/>

The analysis at hand aims at throwing a comparative glance on the structural analyses<sup>2</sup> of the Netherlands, Silesia / Poland and the Bavarian Allgäu / Germany:

- Petrusa, T.; Bahr, C.; Goller, A.; Vogel, J. (2009): Training of Ageing Employees: Regional Report of the Netherlands. Nijmegen, August 2009.
- Bagińska, A.; Bannenberg, L.-M. (2009): Analysis of the structural framework for the economic activity and the continuing vocational education and training of older persons in Silesia. Zory / Erfurt, August 2009.
- Jäger, U.; Borchel, C.; Grießer, A.; Schneider, N. (2009): A structural analysis of the Bavarian Allgäu. Focus: Ageing employees and opportunities for an ongoing employment. Gotha / Erfurt, August 2009.

Those reports were compiled by the BusQua operational partners Kenniscentrum Beroepsonderwijs Arbeidmarkt (KBA), Źorska Izba Gospodarcza (ZorIG) respectively Eichenbaum Gesellschaft für Organisationsberatung, Marketing, PR und Bildung mbH with preparatory work of students from the University of Erfurt. In the framework of the comparative analysis, central findings of the three reports will be summed up.<sup>3</sup> Beside a general view on the regions' character (chapter 2), the article at hand provides insights in the demographic (chapter 3) and economic development (chapter 4) in the Netherlands, Silesia and the Bavarian Allgäu. Furthermore, the labour market participation and activity of the target group, i. e. older persons, will be regarded (chapter 5) as well as impeding and supporting factors concerning the employment of older people (chapter 6). Finally, the working fields identified as age-appropriate, regional and operational prospective within the respective regional reports are presented (chapter 7). If not stated otherwise, the following explanations exclusively refer to the above mentioned reports.

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<sup>2</sup> The Dutch report comprises the Netherlands as a whole, whereas the Polish and German reports focus mainly on the regional presentation of Silesia respectively the Bavarian Allgäu.

<sup>3</sup> If not stated otherwise, the following data and explanations exclusively refer to the above named reports. The comparative analysis at hand is compiled without a repeating bibliography. Therefore only additional references and the reports (as underlying analyses) are listed at the end of this article.

## **2 General characterization of the Netherlands, Silesia and Allgäu**

The focus of the regional reports and this comparative analysis lies on three countries respectively regions: the Netherlands, Silesia / Poland and the Allgäu / Germany. First of all, a short glance ought to be thrown on their location and general characterisation in order to receive an overall impression.

The Netherlands are situated in the North-Western part of Europe, being bordered by the North Sea in the North and West, Belgium in the South and Germany in the East. Its capital is Amsterdam, the seat of the government lies in Den Haag. The country is divided into twelve provinces: Drenthe, Groningen and Friesland in the North, Flevoland, Gelderland und Overijssel in the East, Zeeland, Brabant and Limburg in the South and Utrecht, North and South Holland in the West. Altogether, the country covers an area of 41,526 km<sup>2</sup>. Counting 16,496,079 inhabitants in 2009, its population density mounts up to 397 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>). Parts of the Netherlands are won from the sea by land reclamation, named polder. Furthermore it can be characterised as a geographically low-lying country: about one half of the country lies less than one meter above sea level, about on fourth under sea level. Those plain areas are mostly protected by dikes with a length of circa 3,000 km altogether.

Silesia is a Polish Voivodeship located in the Southern part of Poland and covers an area of 12,334 km<sup>2</sup>. It borders the Czech Republic and Slovakia in the South and four other Polish Voivodeships in the West (Opole), North (Łódź) and North-East (Świętokrzyskie) and East (Lesser Poland). With 378 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup> respectively 4,669,137 inhabitants in 2008, the Silesia Voivodeship has the highest population density in Poland. Therefore it might not surprise that Silesia is one of the most urbanized regions in Poland – with a total of 71 towns (whereas four have more than 200,000 inhabitants) respectively 58 towns per 10,000 km<sup>2</sup> (whereas the national average is 28 towns per 10,000 km<sup>2</sup>). It comprises four great city agglomerations with significance on European and national level: Upper Silesia, Bielsko-Biala, Częstochowa and Rybnik. This urban character goes along with a high grade of industrialization in the Silesian Voivodship, but should not belie the structural diversity of the region which also comprises agricultural areas and a wide landscape with significant natural resources.

The Allgäu is a countryside which lies in the South of Germany and partly in some frontier areas of Austria. Actually, it has no strictly defined geographical boundaries and so different opinions can be found how and where to locate the region – at least in its border areas. In Germany, it ranges over the Southern part of the Bavarian administrative district Schwaben and a part of the outer South-East of the Federal state Baden-Württemberg. The Allgäu is often divided into the sub regions Ostallgäu, Oberallgäu, Unterallgäu und Westallgäu whereas not fixed districts are meant, but rural areas merging into each other. In accordance with its very rural character, the Allgäu only contains few and small(er) towns, e. g. Kempten and Kaufbeuren situated in the Bavarian part of the Allgäu. Due to statistical issues, the regional report and comparative analysis refer to the Bavarian part of the Allgäu covering Schwaben and the two mentioned towns. Therefore a reference size for the target region is 3,350 km<sup>2</sup> with 469,037 inhabitants in 2007 mounting up to a population density of 140 inhabitants per km<sup>2</sup>.

### **3 Demographic development in the target regions**

Concerning the demographic development within recent years, quite different trends can be detected in the respective regions. The number of inhabitants in the Bavarian Allgäu constantly rose in recent years and summed up to about 0.5 million people in 2007 as the population growth was and still is positive. This development was supported inter alia via a migration surplus the region benefited from. Migration is also an issue in the Dutch report, but in contrast to the Allgäu, the number of emigrating people has been larger than those immigrating for many years (except the first half of 2008). In the Netherlands, where about 16.5 million people live, only a small annual growth of the population was registered within the last years. So in recent years, the total amount of inhabitants has not grown considerably in the country. In contrast to that, a minus in the natural population increase occurred in the Silesian Voivodeship. As a result, the total amount of population decreased in the last years and reached about 4.7 million inhabitants.

Whilst the amount of the total population in the Netherlands, Silesia and Allgäu turns out to take different lines, i. e. decrease versus increase, a closer look to the age composition points to a common trend in the regions. For instance in Silesia, the share of pre-working age population significantly declined, whereas the share of working age population only increased marginally and the share of post-working age population rose considerably. The Dutch structural analysis emphasises in this context that the younger part of the working age population (20 – 39 years) was significantly declining in recent years. In the Bavarian Allgäu the share of younger people up to 18 years is already lower than the share of older people aged 65 and older. Trends like this are spread all over Europe at the moment and will influence more or less all countries and their societies in the years to come.

At the moment, an average age of 37.3 (men: 35.4, women: 39.3) years in Poland, 39.7 (men: 38.9, women: 40.5) years in the Netherlands and 43 (men: 41.8, women: 44.3) years in Germany is stated.<sup>4</sup> But the picture of these – currently – quite young countries will change in the near future considerably. All three regional reports point to low birth / fertility rates and declining mortality rates in the Netherlands, Silesia and

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<sup>4</sup> Cp. Ipicture-Länderdatenbank 2009, demographic data of the Netherlands, Poland and Germany.

the Bavarian Allgäu as well. Furthermore, an increasing life expectancy (e. g. via high standard of living, good health care system, new medical technologies, modern diagnostic methods, healthy lifestyle) can be observed. These issues do not only refer to past developments in the regions (as stated in the Dutch and Silesian analyses), but also to future trends according to prognoses (as exposed in the report of the Allgäu). As a consequence, the number of children and youngsters in the regions will decline while the number of older and elderly people continues to rise.

In the long(er) term, the various factors will inevitably lead to a shrinking and ageing total population in general and working age population in particular. The scenario outlined here in short, is picked out as a central issue in the regional reports under consideration of the respective regional and national data. Nevertheless, some central statements ought to be cited in order to get an idea of the demographic change in the target regions:

*“The Netherlands are dealing with a slowly growing population. [...] Prognoses indicate the Dutch population will reach 17.5 million people in 2038 and will shrink after that year. The slow growth of the population in the Netherlands, combined with a long life expectancy and slow (natural) population growth, result in a population that is ageing. [...] The population in the Netherlands is expected to age considerably over the next 50 years. [...] It is expected that the number of 65+ will rise from 2.4 million in 2008 to 4.5 million in 2040.”* (Petrusa et al. 2009, p. 3 and 4)

According to the prognosis of the Silesian statistical yearbook with regard to the development of the working and non working age population until 2030, *“the total population of Silesia will shrink by 16% up to the year 2030: from a total population of 4,714,982 in 2008 to 4,312,700 in 2020 to 3,952,400 in 2030.”* Meanwhile, *“[t]he share of the pre-working age population will decrease by 38% up to the year 2030. The share of the working age population will decrease by 26% until 2030. The share of the post-working population will increase by 35% up to the year 2030.”* (Bagińska et al. 2009, p. 8)

The projection for the demographic development in the Bavarian Allgäu points to *“a steady increase until 2015 with a maximum of 471,600 inhabitants in 2014. After 2015 there will be a downturn to 470,800 in 2020 and also continues decreasing slightly in the following years.”* Moreover, prognoses forecast that *“the share of the inhabitants who are older than 60 years will be about 28.21 % in year 2015 and even 30.33 % in year 2020 [...] [whereas] the share of inhabitants, which are below 20 years old, will constantly decrease.”* (Jäger et al. 2009, p. 3 and 6)

#### **4 Economic development in recent years and current situation**

At the time when the structural analyses for the Netherlands, Silesia and Bavaria were conducted, the economic crisis was just in the starting blocks. Its impact on the economy in the target regions could not be foreseen yet, accordant data was hardly or only partly available. It can be assumed, however, that all three were and still are (more or less) dealing with the effects of the international economic crisis. The following explanations are based on the findings of the regional reports in order to provide insight in the economic development and situation in the target regions. It renounces prognosis for the future development as hitherto forecasts will most likely have to be readjusted with regard to the economic crisis.

Following the Dutch report, the economy in the Netherlands developed quite well since 2000, but due to the international economic crisis, the growth decreased in 2008. Accordingly, prognoses for the years 2009 and 2010 were revised and forecasted a further decrease of the Dutch economies' growth. For the Silesian and Allgäu region, accordant corrected data with regard to the crisis could not be found, however positive trends in the economic development before that can be stated. In the Bavarian Allgäu, one of the economically strongest regions in Germany, a continuing growth could be noted between 1990 and 2007. In Silesia, a positive trend could be regarded in recent years, too, whereas the region belongs to the best developed in Poland. In accordance with the outlined economic growth, the number of jobs and level of (un-)employment in general developed.

For many years the unemployment rate in the Netherlands was decreasing and the number of jobs was increasing. However, latest data pointed to a fast rising unemployment and a decreasing number of jobs due to the crisis. Nevertheless, the unemployment rate is compared to other European countries and regions quite low. In contrast to that, the unemployment rate in the Silesian Voivodeship for instance still is above the European average, although it significantly decreased in recent years. The labour market also showed signs of further recovery in 2008. A noticeable growth of employment could be registered in the Bavarian Allgäu between 2000 and 2008, too. The business location of the Federal state Bavaria can be characterized by a higher employment dynamic and low unemployment rates in general. Numbers

taking into account the impact of the international economic crisis into account were up to the analysis neither for the Allgäu nor for Silesia available.

Following the regional reports it can be observed that in all three countries and regions, the service sector is of utmost and increasing importance. It is estimated for whole Europe and its member states that the third sector will gain more and more relevance whereas traditional manufacturing and industrial fields will lose economic weight. A minor role in the target regions plays agriculture, fishing and forestry. The Netherlands can be described as a service economy as the third sector is the biggest by the gross domestic product (GDP). It is followed by the industrial sector and the agricultural sector whereas the last one is only of minor importance. All three sectors are (more or less) influenced by the crisis at the moment.

A similar picture can be drawn for the Allgäu where the economic importance of the service sector grew rapidly in recent years. The second sector still remains a relevant factor despite the percentage decrease of manufacturing whilst the third sector loses more and more its significance within the economic structure. The importance of each economic sector in the Netherlands and in the Allgäu is not only backed up by its percentage share of GDP, but also by the size resulting from the number of employees. In contrast to that, the Polish report points to the industrial and manufacturing sector with the most employees, but the service sector with the highest shares of GDP in the Silesian Voivodeship. But in accordance with the two other regions, agriculture, fishing and forestry form the smallest sector, too.

A regional particularity of Silesia is the comparatively high amount of small and medium-sized enterprises which has increased significantly since the transformation and is inter alia in the focus of the Voivodeships' development strategies. As a particularity of the Polish region it can be noted moreover that Silesia is currently influenced by restructuring processes. Despite the increasing importance of the service sector, the Silesian Voivodeship still is a predominantly industrial region with a strong influence of the mining and metallurgy industry. As it was / is rich in various natural resources (e. g. coal, zinc, lead, methane, marl, limestone), the largest Polish industrial area has been established in Silesia and developments of the 18th, 19th and 20th still impress the characteristic of the region.

For different reasons (decreasing demand of coal and mining, technical deficits, environmental pollution, etc.) restructuring processes begun in the last decade of the 20th century and so the economic structure and its main focus are changing at the moment. However, industry still plays an important role, at the moment in particular electrical and power engineering, automotive and food industry as well as information technology. Beside this, the construction industry belongs to those of economic importance in Silesia. Furthermore, the regional government especially supports tourism and the field of recreational, cultural and sporting activities via particular development strategies and operational programs.

Structural changes and particularities were also observed in other regions. In the Bavarian Allgäu, for instance, the agriculture was dominated for a long time by flax farming. At the beginning of the 19th century, however, the focus on grain and flax farming shifted towards grazing and tourism. Due to improved fodder and associated milk quality, furthermore the production of cheese started with the help of new know-how and technologies. In line with these processes a particular feature established in the Bavarian Allgäu: a high number of farms. So a considerable amount of small and medium-sized agricultural businesses influences the regions' characteristic. Currently, services (in particular tourism), mechanical and precision engineering, food production and processing, packaging and construction trade are seen as important branches. Accordingly, recent structural data point to a skill shortage respectively lack of skilled workers especially in the service sector and manufacturing industry where currently a great amount of jobs can not be filled.

Concerning the identification of growing and non-growing sectors it can be noted that the regional reports of Silesia and the Allgäu mainly focus on historical developments, whereas the Dutch one refers in particular to the impacts of the economic crisis: Affected branches in the Netherlands are seen especially in the stock broking and car industry where many jobs were lost due to recent developments. Beside the decrease of vacancies in the commercial services, fewer vacancies were also registered in the building and construction industries. A shortage of manpower respectively a lack of skilled workers was also complained about in the metal industry, electro technology and transport since 2006. However, these sectors were affected by the crises, too. In contrast to that, prognoses predict a lot of new

jobs in public administration, culture, health and care for the next years. There is a high demand for consultants, administrators, medical and nursing assistants, personnel for production and maintenance. A considerable amount of employers see the current shortage of employees as a constraint for further economic growth. Currently, the commercial (though the above mentioned decrease), non-commercial and business services offer most vacancies.

Last but not least, the economic development and current situation should not only regard vacancies (i. e. the demand for employees). The supply of labour has to be considered, too. In chapter 3, a central finding concerning that issue was already mentioned: The demographic development in the target regions will in the long(er) term not only lead to a shrinking and ageing population in general, but to a shrinking and ageing working-age population, too. These aspects become more obvious within a deeper analysis of the labour market. So in the Dutch report it is stated for instance: “As the amount of older persons in the Dutch society increases, the size of active people on the labour market decreases. [...] [T]he potential labour market is expected to decrease [...]. Related to the population ageing the Dutch labour force is expected to grow too little unless more measures are being taken.” (Petrusa et al. 2009, p. 7) The structural analysis of the Bavarian Allgäu furthermore points to associated ageing processes on the labour market: “[T]he part of the older [...] employees [...] has risen. This movement will go on during the next years [and] [...] is a special challenge for the whole German labour market.” (Jäger et al. 2009, p. 12)

Without doubt, the issue of a shrinking and ageing labour force will have far-reaching impacts (e. g. on the social and economic system) and therefore is challenge for all three regions targeted in the BusQua project. Against this background, all three structural analyses come to the central conclusion that it will become “more and more important to use the existent potential of human resources to assure the function ability of economy and society” (Bagińska et al. 2009, p. 7). This means inter alia to keep people longer – or even as long as possible – active and, if necessary, to (re-) integrate older persons on the labour market. But before coming to that point, the participation and activity of older persons on the labour market should be regarded more closely in the next section.

## 5 Labour market participation and activity of older persons

The Lisbon Strategy targets inter alia at reaching an employment rate of 50% for older persons and delaying the retirement age across the European Union by 2010. Against this background, the labour market participation and activity of older persons<sup>5</sup> is analysed deeply in the three regional reports. It can be observed that there is a consciousness concerning the target groups' difficult situation on the labour market in the Netherlands, Poland and Germany. Nevertheless, the status quo makes clear that further efforts are necessary – even though older persons' professional activity might have risen in recent years.

The gross labour market participation of older people considerably improved within the last decade (e. g. for the age group of 55- to 64-years-olds: 47% in 2007 in contrast to 25% in 1996). Nevertheless, the situation still is critical in comparison with other countries (a finding in the Dutch report based on OECD data) and even more on national level when comparing older persons' activity with other age groups. The regional report on the Bavarian Allgäu confirms the Dutch findings as the employment situation of older people in Bavaria has considerably improved in recent years. So the employment rate nearly reached the Lisbon strategy with regard to people aged between 55 and 64 years (49.7% in 2005). However, the female labour market participation is quite low.

In Poland, the 50+ generation is rated as one group (beside low qualified and young people) with the most difficult situation on the labour market, too. In comparison with other age groups, older persons' activity is very low and a closer look furthermore reveals that this issue significantly differs within the target group: with increasing age the professional activity sharply decreases (e. g. only about 5% of the 60- to 64-year-olds are professional active) The Silesian structural analysis additionally features two other relevant issues: the comparison of men and women exposes a higher activity of older males (similar to the Bavarian finding); the comparison of urban and rural areas shows a higher activity of older urban residents.

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<sup>5</sup> Striking are the different definitions, terms and classifications used for describing the target group of (or parts of it) in the three regional reports and their underlying sources (e. g. generation 50+, 55- to 64-year-olds, people aged 60 to 64 years, etc. ). As the article at hand aims at providing a general view and comparing central findings, a comprehensive understanding of 'older persons' is leading.

Regarding older persons' activity, a short glance ought to be thrown on the sectors in which most older employees work. The structural analysis of the Netherlands reveals that the fields of education, public administration and government, agriculture and fishery, manufacturing and mineral extraction, health care, transport, storage and communication are those with the oldest labour force. Polish statistical data in this context point to a relatively high share of older employees in sectors dealing with real estate, renting and business activities as well as other community, social and personal service activities – whereas the last mentioned belong to currently supported fields as the regional governments' development strategies and operational programs target them in particular.

Further sectors in Poland with high shares of older employees are electricity, gas and water supply, construction, partly manufacturing and automotive industry. It is worth mentioning that in Silesia the electricity, gas and water supply as well as the construction sector registered a decrease of employed persons. In contrast to that, the employment rate of older employees in the construction sector is quite low in Bavaria. This counts also for financial and technical businesses. The highest shares rather can be found in the service sector, manufacturing and trade (e. g. textile) sector, hotel and transport industry. For many years the metalworking industry also registered an increasing share of older employees.

The professional activity of older persons mentioned above implies two sides of a coin: active people being actually employed on the one side, and people seeking for work – i. e. being unemployed – on the other side. Taking this into consideration, all three reports reveal that not only the activity rate, but also the employment rate of older persons is low, i. e. a large part of the target group is faced with unemployment. A closer look on this furthermore reveals another important issue: When older people become unemployed the unemployment lasts relatively long. So, in the Netherlands for instance, long-term unemployment is a major problem amongst the 50- to 64-year-olds as about 50% are hit by this. The Silesian report confirms this trend with the age groups 45 to 54 and 55 and more as well.

Altogether it can be concluded that the situation of older persons on the labour market is critical in the Netherlands, Poland and Germany as the regional structural analyses reveal. Beside the labour market activity of older persons, a view on

professional non-active people is necessary as well. Following the Dutch, Silesian and Bavarian structural analysis, a large part of older persons are not active on the labour market due to early retirement, pension or disability schemes. The last issue is especially true for the Netherlands where the largest contingent of older people neither working nor being unemployed is registered as ill and disabled. In all three countries respectively regions, the following trend dominates in general: A large amount of older persons retire many years before the official retirement age of 65 years<sup>6</sup> whereas this refers more often and even earlier to women. The actual retirement age in Poland, for instance, averages 59 years – in contrast to that the European average equals 61 years.

## **6 Factors impeding and supporting older persons' employability**

Faced with the critical situation of older persons' labour market participation and activity, the question arises for what reasons a large amount of them is unemployed or professional inactive. Therefore a closer look ought to be spent on factors impeding the employability of the target group. Following the regional reports concerning that issue, it turns out in the first instance that the decision of leaving the labour force respectively the labour market in general results from a process to which various conditions contribute, in professional literature often termed as so called push and pull factors<sup>7</sup>.

Push factors can be described as negative perceived aspects which arouse the concerned persons' desire of giving up the current job or even conditions forcing him/her to do so (e. g. because of health problems, conflicts at work or physical straining work conditions, dismissals, missing skills and qualifications). Pull factors can be found outside the occupational field as they represent more individual motives and/or pose (more or less attractive) incentives for leaving the job (e. g. financial incentives with regard to early retirement and pension schemes, care for family members, individual orientation towards leisure time).

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<sup>6</sup> Exception: In Poland, the retirement age of 65 years only refers to men whereas women retire at the age of 60 years. Cp. Europa-Kontakt Informations- und Verlagsgesellschaft mbH 2006.

<sup>7</sup> Cp. for instance Himmelreicher et al. 2008, p. 3 et seq. or Tesch-Römer et al. 2004, p. 72.

First of all, the financial incentives for early retirement and pre-pension schemes are mentioned in all three regional reports as one reason for older persons' decreasing labour market participation and activity. In connection with this, the establishment of labour market openings and chances for younger people is taken into account in the Netherlands and the Silesian Voivodeship as well. But incentives and schemes for leaving the labour market earlier were whittled down and repealed in recent years as the demographic change and its impact on the social and economic system became more and more obvious. An example for that is the abolition of "58er-Regelung" mentioned in the German structural analysis. Quite the contrary, different strategies and development plans, various projects and initiatives for enhancing older peoples' employability and their labour market participation currently supersede the former procedures – in the Netherlands, Poland and Germany as well.

The structural analyses furthermore reveal that ageism is a major problem in all three regions. So many employers are not willing to employ older persons due to stereotypical ideas and prejudices. In their opinion, older employees have obsolete knowledge and skills, declining cognitive and physical capabilities and capacities, but increasing health problems. Furthermore, older people are seen as less competitive, productive and innovative and not open to changes. Although a lot of recent studies have disproved or at least restricted these misconceptions<sup>8</sup>, they still exist in peoples' mind and so sceptical attitudes often dominate when it comes to the question of recruiting and employing older persons. Even though employers appreciate older employees' knowhow and work experience<sup>9</sup>, they are more likely to hire younger employees – as the labour costs are taken into account, for instance. Altogether, it can be stated that age discrimination poses enormous barriers in the Netherlands, Poland and Germany and impedes the labour market participation and activity of older persons considerably.

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<sup>8</sup> In professional literature termed as deficit model, cp. Barthel; Vonken 2006, p. 4 et seq. By now, the deficit model which presumes a declining performance of older people is considered as obsolete. According to newer findings they do not learn or work worse than younger ones, but in an altered way.

<sup>9</sup> The focus of recent studies shifts – in contrary to the former deficit approach – more and more towards particular strengths and virtues older people possess. Different surveys of employers reveal that in particular the ample knowhow and experience, loyalty, discipline, work ethic and quality awareness of older employees are recognised.

Beside employers' discriminative behaviour, individual exceptions and attitudes of the target group play a decisive role as well. Many older employees are not (anymore) willing to remain on the labour market or to return to the labour force whereas various reasons can be detected (e. g. rejection because of hard working conditions, demanding attitudes towards payment). Some even do not need to work any longer and regard earlier retirement as normal case. Further problematic factors can be seen in health reasons; i. e. older people often retire because of illness and disability. This often comes along with straining work conditions, non age-appropriate work places or job profiles. In this context, the Polish report also points to serious psychological problems (e. g. low self-esteem, inner resignation) experienced by older persons. Moreover, older persons' frequently leave the labour market for care reasons, e. g. when family members have to be looked after or other similar duties occur. Last but not least, all three regional reports stress the point that labour market participation also has to do with the qualification and educational level of older persons. So it is stated, for instance, that higher qualified remain active for a longer time in comparison with low-skilled employees. Moreover the probability of unemployment is rated higher for people with a low(er) educational level.

Due to the above mentioned problems, a broad range of countermeasures were initiated in recent years to support older persons' employability and keep them longer active on the labour market. The Dutch and German analyses in this context cite as an example reforms with regard to pension schemes, early retirement possibilities and disability benefits. Incentives were developed, but people were also pressed to stay in work or find a job. Furthermore, the endeavours in the Netherlands against ageism and other forms of discrimination via enacted laws are especially noteworthy. In all three countries respectively regions strategies and plans for health protection and support were developed. Special training programs for older persons were initiated whereas other projects targeted at raising employers' consciousness of older persons' knowhow and expertise, improving working conditions, etc. Altogether, those efforts led to higher participation and activity rates, but will have to be continued in the years to come as still many problems exist with regard to older persons' employability.

## 7 Conclusion: Training as an answer

Currently, the Netherlands, Poland and Germany are becoming more and more active with regard to the above mentioned issues. Although three European regions with different backgrounds are regarded in the framework of the structural analyses, it can be observed that they have to deal with similar concerns and assignments. As many other countries and regions all over Europe, the Netherlands as well as Silesia and the Bavarian Allgäu are / will be confronted with a shrinking and even ageing labour force. A common task therefore is to find adequate solutions for enhancing older persons' employability while taking the target groups' particularities into account. The *training of older employees* might be one answer to this.

BusQua aims at the specific group of employees aged 45 years and older. Within the context of life-long learning, training redounds to upgraded knowledge and skills and thereby contributes to a prolonged labour market participation and activity of these persons. However, the learning needs, interests and expectations of the target group have to be considered, its experience and expertise has to be integrated. The qualification concept to be transferred and adapted as well as the training material to be developed within the project is supposed to fulfil those requirements. In this context, the underlying pedagogical concept refers to the work-process-oriented training approach which integrates older persons' knowhow, skills and experience and is suited to their learning needs and interests, but also to operational demands.

The structural analysis of the Netherlands, Silesia and the Bavarian Allgäu conducted within the BusQua project aimed at identifying age-appropriate, but also regional and operational prospective fields of activity in which older employees could be trained in. Within the Dutch regional report, the health care sector in general respectively the home care sector in particular is identified as one fulfilling the mentioned criteria in the Netherlands. The Silesian report reveals among others building and construction as a sector of growing importance for the Voivodeship and points to possibilities for prolonging older employees' occupation in this field. On the part of the report referring to the Bavarian Allgäu, the tourism as well as the service and health care sector are identified as containing prospective fields of activities for older employees in the region.

In accordance with the selected sectors and under consideration of age-related particularities, specific training material and curricula are currently designed in the target regions and will be completed by the end of the year. The Dutch training model in this context is based on the profile of a care taker in the vocational field of home care. This so called “Eerste Verantwoordelijke (EV’er) in the thuiszorg” is inter alia responsible for the planning of health care, developing a health care plan, executing and evaluating health care, deciding on when and how to transfer care to other professionals and organisations. With regard to the Polish training approach, the qualification profile for a coordinator of construction work in small and medium-sized enterprises is decisive, comprising for instance the analysis of documentation, the planning, organisation and realisation of work and building assurance. The German qualification concept is influenced by the idea of combining aspects of service, health care and tourism within the profile of “Seniorenbegleiter/in in Tourismusregionen” which involves the guidance and assistance of older and elderly persons in regions of tourism.<sup>10</sup>

Currently, the above mentioned variously shaped qualification profiles underlie the conceptual design of age-appropriate training to be implemented in the regions of Friesland, Silesia and Allgäu in 2010. This process is accomplished by the BusQua operational partners KBA in the Netherlands, ZorIG in Poland and Eichenbaum in Germany with the support of the University of Erfurt. Via the involvement of professionals and cooperation with experts and learning counsellors the transfer and adaption of the qualification concepts in the target regions is facilitated. Furthermore, the integration of support structures and networks aim at enhancing the recognition of the developed training models and support the dissemination and exploitation of the project activities and results in an effective and sustainable way. It can be assumed that in the long(er) term the BusQua idea will be picked up by other stakeholders on the labour market and in the training sector when being confronted with the impacts of the demographic change and pushed to (re-) integrate resources.

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<sup>10</sup> This qualification profile does not exactly concur with the one originally stated in the report of the Bavarian Allgäu (“tour guide for physically-challenged people”), but refers to newer developments in the project. However, the profile at hand is only slightly altered compared with the one revealed in the regional report as it encompasses similar processes and competencies.

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