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*Walter Zsilincsar\**

## **FUTURE PERSPECTIVES FOR SMALL URBAN CENTRES IN AUSTRIA**

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The paper discusses perspectives for the future development of small urban centres in Austria. After some general remarks on their specific role within an urban network and the challenges they face in a globalizing world historical heritage is being analysed as one future chance for positive development. Using the example of the small industrial town and district capital Waidhofen an der Ybbs some successful ways and possibilities of urban renewal are presented. This leads to a final treatment and evaluation of integrated and participatory planning strategies as a basis for urban sustainable development.

**Key words:** globalization historical heritage, urban hierarchy, city-project, urban renewal, integrated and participatory planning, Austria

### **INTRODUCTION**

Small urban centres are increasingly gaining interest not only among urban geographers, but also with economists, architects, town and regional planners, whereas historians, art historians, conservators and sociologists have always shown their concern with this topic. Despite research activities within the single disciplines mentioned above multidisciplinary and cross-border approaches investigating historic development, present state and future prospect of small towns are becoming more and more important. The growing importance of small urban centres has various reasons. In short they are:

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\* Institut für Geographie und Raumforschung, Universität Graz, Heinrichstraße 36, A-8010 Graz, Österreich

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- the growing desire of many citizens for perspicuity of the structures they are living in,
  - the general fears of the globalization process, causing the widening gap between poor and rich,
  - an increasing social distance and even frost especially within the population of big cities,
  - the deterioration of urban environmental conditions concerning air and water pollution, noise, plant diseases, etc. which becomes visible especially in big metropolitan regions,
  - personal stress leading to higher risks such as heart attacks, mental diseases, and strokes connected with metropolitan life-styles,
  - a strong feeling for security, confidence and humaneness to overcome anonymity and the risks connected with unemployment, low income, or the loss of home,
  - policy making, which is, usually more citizen-orientated in small towns than in bigger ones and readier to immediately react on the special needs or desires of the single burger. The very modern slogan among our politicians of a “burger society” or “civil society” finds its best expression and perhaps comes closest to the ideal in small urban societies.

This contribution does not claim to present a complete and perfectly composed essay on all the prospects future perspectives for small urban centres in Austria. Such a far reaching and complicated goal cannot be achieved within a few pages. Our aim is to present some ideas concerning the topic which among others result from more than twenty years of experience as a representative of the *Austrian Association of Cities* in the *Commission for the Preservation of Historic Centres* of the Styrian Provincial Government and from a first confrontation of the author with the problems of a small town as early as 1967 (Zsilincsar 1967 and 1973).

Apart from others some recent publications shall be mentioned which underline the new concern in the present situation of small towns and the urban transformation process by the example of some former socialist countries: *Small Towns of the Slovak Republic within the Transformation Stage* by Vladimír Slavík (2002), *Slovene Cities and Suburbs in Transformation* by Marjan Ravbar (1997), *Geography of Small Moravian Towns: Case Study Bučovice* (2001) by Antonín Vaishar et al., and a Russian study by A. A. Manakov (2002) *Using the Historical Heritage of Small Town with the Purpose of its Development*.

There is neither need nor is it our ambition to add some further considerations to the methodological discussion on the problem of how to qualitatively define city-size groups. From a mere practical and statistical point of view which comes quite close to reality of the Austrian urban landscape it seems appropriate to draw the limit between smaller and bigger towns or cities in our country near 20.000 inhabitants. It should be mentioned that a similar classification can be found in the articles mentioned above (Slavík 2002, p. 147; Ravbar 1997, p. 82; Vaishar et al. 2001, p. 44). The Austrian Statistics define “small towns” by size (less than 20.000 inhabitants) and function (less than 7 % agrarian population) (Bundesanstalt Statistik Österreich 1997).

## FUTURE PERSPECTIVES OF SMALL URBAN CENTRES IN AUSTRIA – SOME GENERAL REMARKS

Despite the fact that Austria with 83,858 sq. km in size and 8,065,000 inhabitants is one of the smaller countries of Europe it disposes of a diverse, manifold, multifunctional, and lively urban landscape with diverse historical, cultural, social, economic, and political backgrounds.

Our question now is how the various small towns and cities can or should benefit from their different backgrounds and historic urban growth conditions, or if they would not be better off forgetting about their roots, which are frequently viewed as obstructive to progress and development.

To find an answer to this question it would be alluring and challenging if there existed comparative and scientifically based investigations on the life-cycles of small towns.

The difficulty if not to say impossibility of composing such a monumental and comprehensive urban geographical history is based on the demand that for each epoch of urban development it simultaneously should analyse the actual external framework conditions (socio-economic, socio-political, socio-cultural, legal, sanitary and health related, transport, technological, constructive ones, etc.) together with internal conditions of the same backgrounds. Apart from that we do not only have to focus on general historical situations and mainstreams but also on those single persons (important mayors, entrepreneurs), power groups, and institutions that during a certain period of time have notably and sustainably steered and influenced the fate and history of urban places.

They set marks for future generations either by giving their cities a new architectonic shape, or by initiating far-reaching planning activities and leaving their footprints in the urban social, cultural, and economic policy which in some cases reached far beyond the city limits.

When paradigmatic discussions among German human geographers (H. Bobek, W. Hartke, K. Ruppert, F. Schaffer, E. Winkler et al.) on how to position the soaring field of social geography in the fifties and sixties of the last century had reached their climax it was the social group which was estimated most important for shaping the human environment. Nevertheless already then single voices could be heard also demanding also the consideration of the activities, attitudes and the efficiency of single persons when investigating the social environment (cf. Zsilincsar 1972). Today there is no doubt about that any longer. Remember the dominant role single, powerful persons can play dominating decision making processes especially in small communities. They can steer the destiny, alter the outward appearance of settlements or influence community life as a whole. For all that geographers have made rather rare attempts so far to make the history of life and the result of communal-political activities and visions of local politicians the topic of sound, multidisciplinary, open minded and innovative investigations. The fact that at least in Austria powerful mayors are attributed the unofficial yet highly suggestive title "community or local emperor" by the public underlines the above point of view. Persons of excellence whatever their position in public life may be able to decisively interfere with the future development of urban (and other) places.

Each single town or city has its own very individual past, present and future. Apart from that its fate and destination increasingly rest upon influences and steering mechanisms from outside not only in a regional context, but more and more on the national, even global levels. Could “globalization” provide a future prospect for small towns? Would it help merely to compensate for the disadvantages of the natural environment (relief, surface-, hydrologic-, climatic conditions, etc.) determining urban expansion, of connectivity and above all attractiveness or quality of life not only for the local population, but in a special sense for immigrating labour force and for innovative and expanding firms to guarantee a prospering urban development?

A wide spread phenomenon of the present globalization process is the general loss of the importance of special geographical sites and locations for entrepreneurial decisions. In Austria in the past twenty to thirty years big national and international firms (“global players”) have founded new branches, bases and factories in a fast growing number particularly in small towns and preferably within a rural environment. The most frequent branches that have been participating in this process are the electronics sector, chemical and pharmaceutical industries, the telecommunications sector, food processing, textile and leather industries, and, notably in the province of Styria, supplier industries for international motorcar production. Yet, it is exactly these branches that today suffer most from heavy turbulences on the national and international stock markets.

During the last fifteen years central Styria, the region around the capital city of Graz (2001 pop. 227,000) has been developing a new “motor cluster” based on skills and traditions which have been impressed on this region for more than a century. The name of PUCH standing for high-quality bikes, motorbikes and small cars was a world-wide esteemed trade-mark. After a severe crisis of the branch in the eighties which resulted in the closure of the PUCH bike and bicycle factory a new start was made when the US-American car producer Chrysler, later Daimler-Chrysler after the unification with German Mercedes Benz, bought the plant to assemble mini-vans, and 4 WD cars. Other big car producers like Fiat, VW, BMW or SAAB meanwhile had, at least temporarily, shifted some components of their car production to Graz. The Styrian motor cluster today (2002) provides jobs for 22,400 people.

The most recent and far reaching impulse for the further development of a global “centre of excellence” for the automotive industry in Styria with a regional exhibition can be viewed since Frank Stronach, a former citizen of the Styrian small town of Weiz, some 20 km north-west of Graz, renowned for hosting the world famous ELIN transformer plant, has overtaken several existing firms or founded new plants not only in Styrian small towns like Weiz, Ilz, Lannach, but also in other parts of Austria. Stronach had emigrated to Canada in 1954 and finally became one of the biggest tycoons and global players of the production of car parts and supplier goods with his Magna-trust. His initiatives brought about around 850 new jobs since he started his activities in Austria in 1997.

Frank Stronach could be quoted as an example of a single person whose ambitions, strong will and activities have opened new perspectives not only for the single job-seeker, but also for little communes as a whole. Jobs create personal incomes, consumption, tax receipts, that is, general value addition.

So far, so good. Yet, every picture has a dark side too. Since especially small towns often depend on one or very few big employers only concerning their labour market the local authorities far too willingly offer legal or financial concessions, privileges and exemption clauses to (inter)national enterprises searching for a new location. These firms, however, acting in a global market with the only goal of optimizing their operating profits dislocate production sites without any regard to the overall economic situation of the present location as soon as the trading results desired are no longer guaranteed there.

Can we say, therefore, that small urban settlements increasingly find themselves caught in the “globalization trap”? Is there a way out? What could it look like? Knowing about the individual character and background of each small town one must not expect answers of general validity to the above questions. There is no doubt, however, that in a regional economic sense many small Austrian towns find themselves on the losers’ side unless they benefit from being embedded into a bigger agglomeration. It is a fact that big globally active firms prefer metropolitan areas as a location for their establishments. There they have got access to the general human resources of the labour market, to facilities of higher education and research, of global information technologies and transfer and they also can make use of excellent transportation conditions, not to neglect cultural offers and leisure activities for their middle and top management. That also motivates many highly specialized small and medium-size enterprises to settle within agglomerated areas.

The present framework conditions for economic development in general do not favour rural areas and their small centres struggling for national or international investors, that is, for survival in an economic environment of growing and intensifying competition. Additional embarrassments may arise from structural changes of the agrarian sector, from the crisis of mining activities or traditional manufacturing like the textile and leather industries or the heavy industry sector. Today even future orientated computer-, electronics- and telecommunication industries are facing a crisis. Many examples especially from the eastern provinces of Austria (Lower Austria, Burgenland, Styria and Carinthia) prove this development. A good example in this respect is the Mur-Mürz-Valley heavy industry region which originates from the second half of the 19th century, and has suffered from severe losses of labour force and inhabitants until the end of the last century, due to the world-wide restructuring process of the iron and steel industry. Other reasons for the economic decline and urban decay of many old and traditional industrial regions especially in Eastern Austria result from ten years of Soviet occupation after World War II and from the closeness to the then Iron Curtain which had cut off many small central places on both sides of the border from their former hinterlands. And yet the past deficiencies of the areas mentioned can be the clue to present and future success. Although historical cross-border contacts between Austria and her former communist neighbour states have not yet reached pre-World War I conditions the situation of many small towns in the border area today justifies hope for mutual benefits. Towns and cities like Bad Leonfelden, Freistadt, Gmünd, Laa an der Thaya, Hainburg, Eisenstadt, Oberwart, Bad Radkersburg, Leibnitz, Lavamünd, Bleiburg and others are witnesses for a mood of break-up which can be felt among huge parts of the population and entrepreneurs since the political changes affected East-Central Europe. But there are also fears to be considered: fears of low-price la-

bour-force and goods, of increasing criminality or of removal of local enterprises to places across the border.

The decline of old, traditional industries in Eastern Austria (textile industry, glass-manufacturing, saw mills, food industry, etc.) was connected with dramatic losses of jobs which for the communities meant lower tax revenues, and as a consequence, insufficient funding of necessary infrastructural investments and/or lacking money for creating favourable factors for the location of new investors.

Unsafe economic conditions in the past, regional remoteness and rather sad expectations as to getting an attractive job on the local labour-market induced many young and skilled people to move to big urban agglomerations like Vienna, Linz, Graz, Klagenfurt or Salzburg. Thus the remaining labour force mainly consists of elderly or unskilled and predominantly female workers. Among the few pull-factors for investors in peripheral small towns there were cheap labour costs and substantial financial aid by the state or provincial governments, acceptance of infrastructure costs by the city councils, legal support and/or exemption clauses regarding environmental regulations. The recent history of the former famous electronics firm SCHRACK, which established a new plant in Waidhofen an der Thaya in northern Lower Austria in 1964 to profit from low wages and the vicinity to the Czecho-Slovak border which promised access to the market of the former East-block proves this situation. In 1995 SCHRACK sold the factory to SIEMENS. After only four years SIEMENS found a new purchaser in an American firm, which decided in January 2003 to remove the production to the Czech Republic, costing 439 employees their job.

**Tab. 1. Population development of small towns and cities in Vorarlberg and the Tirol, 1961-2001**

	1991	2001	abs.	91/01 %	1961	abs.	61/01 %
Feldkirch	26,730	28,604	+1,874	+7.01	17,311	+11,293	+65.24
Lustenau	18,484	19,721	+1,237	+6.69	12,554	+7,167	+57.09
Kufstein	13,484	15,401	+1,917	+14.22	11,196	+4,205	+37.56
Bludenz	13,369	13,745	+376	+2.81	11,108	+2,637	+23.74
Hall in T.	12,386	11,482	-904	-7.30	10,680	+802	+7.51
Schwaz	11,839	12,294	+455	+3.84	9,467	+2,827	+29.86
Kitzbühel	8,119	8,625	+506	+6.29	7,743	+882	+11.39
Götzis	9,512	10,092	+580	+6.10	7,025	+3,067	+43.66
Wörgl	10,041	10,879	+838	+8.35	6,831	+4,048	+59.26
Hard	10,747	11,473	+726	+6.76	6,653	+4,820	+72.45
Landeck	7,411	7,359	-52	-0.70	6,508	+851	+13.09
Rankweil	10,509	11,185	+676	+6.43	6,454	+4,731	+73.30

Source: Statistik Austria

If we consider the situation in the old industrial and border regions of Eastern Austria only we might come to the conclusion that there is little hope for small towns in the future. But such a dark prognosis seems inadequate on several reasons. Firstly, local, regional, national and global conditions are subject

to change and, as mentioned before, it largely depends on the minds, intentions and ambitions of the local population and decision makers what the reactions to these challenges could be. The western provinces of the country Tirol and Vorarlberg as compared with Styria show quite clearly (Tabs. 1 and 2) that small urban places can have good prospects for a prosperous future provided they profit by permeable international borders, regional concentration of know-how, capital investment, future orientated technologies (which can turn out rather short lived as the telecommunication and new technologies sector proves), good traffic links and a stable political situation encouraging economic development.

**Tab. 2. Population development of small towns and cities in Styria, 1961-2001**

	1991	2001	abs,	91/01 %	1961	abs,	61/01 %
Bruck/M,	14,046	13,493	-553	-3.94	16,101	-2,608	-16.20
Fohnsdorf	9,502	8,541	-961	-10.11	11,509	-2,968	-25.79
Judenburg	10,581	18,164	+417	+3.84	9,848	+316	+3.21
Knittelfeld	12,873	12,803	-70	-0.54	14,261	-1,458	-10.22
Kindberg	6,078	5,871	-207	-3.41	5,766	-553	-9.59
Mürz-zuschlag	9,990	9,585	-405	-4.09	11,565	-1,980	-17.12
Zeltweg	8,189	7,863	-326	-3.98	7,340	+523	+7.13
Eisenerz	7,759	6,455	-1,304	-16.80	12,413	-5,958	-48.00
Krieglach	5,116	5,213	+97	+1.50	4,797	+416	+8.67
Trofaiaich	8,519	8,385	-133	-1.56	6,920	+1466	+21.18

Source: Statistik Austria

Although the (neo-liberal) market economy favours competition, competition between rivalling regional centres to attract investors can have disastrous consequences. Since the creation or provision of jobs today is one of the most important tasks of communal policy which very often decides about victory or defeat at the polls (community) politicians are tempted to promise potential investors charges which can debit local budgets for years. Therefore rivalry notably among small towns should not follow the principle that charity begins at home but encourage the formation of regional urban networks utilizing competitive structures as a common chance and synergic effect.

The development of small urban places also in future will be influenced to a high degree outside the control of local decision making.

Local planning, building activities, commercial support and the provision for a sane environment will continue being spheres of responsibility of small towns. Positive future perspectives, however, will largely depend on their ability and readiness to participate in urban and regional networks which necessarily include big cities as centres of excellence, innovation and mutual exchange of goods, human resources and ideas.

Small towns must not only be seen as the lowest step of the urban hierarchy system being either condemned to remain in a state of no account or to be absorbed by the expansion of urban agglomerations and thereby losing their identity. On the contrary they should function as small central clusters within a spatially and telematically interrelated settlement system.

Of course, it would be exiting to focus the interest on the vast and rapidly expanding possibilities and chances that telematics, in the broadest sense, can offer for a new positioning of small towns within a regional, national and even supranational network yet allow me, please, not to concentrate on the "global side" of the urban medal but on its individual, traditional side. Whereas in the first case success depends to a distinct degree on external influences in the second the single community itself decides about the accomplishment of the goal aimed at.

### HISTORICAL HERITAGE AS A FUTURE CHANCE FOR SMALL URBAN PLACES

Reflecting upon the past presupposes occupation with the presence. The Future results from active remembrance of traditions (Beck 1993). Historic urban structures should be seen as part of the strained relations between progress and perseverance (cf. Arbeitsgemeinschaft Alpen-Adria 1985 and 1994). Studying the urban past does not mean a mere retrospective utopia, it is a necessary and unrenounceable guiding principle for a targeted orientation of civil-societal urban development.

If historic urban structures imply any future vision whatsoever it is not the rigid conservation of urban places as historic monuments. Rather a new interpretation of historic forms and features should call the singularity of small Austrian towns and cities back into the minds of the civil society, while not forgetting the fact that historic consciousness by itself does not generate a chance for urban survival in the 21st. century.

Recollecting the roots of Austrian small towns is not merely an expression of historic consciousness and responsibility of some citizens and administrative officers, it is an indication of their economic sentiment too. Our historic town centres should be perceived as "a historic scene of action where goods are being put on stage" the German market researcher Joachim Will (2000) demands. And in fact, many – not only small – urban centres follow this proposal by purposefully making use of the urban architectonic scene for public cultural or social events which in small towns are usually related to folkloristic or religious occasions either to directly stimulate the visitors to spend money at the various mobile market stalls, nearby inns, restaurants or shops or just to incite them to come back.

It is exactly that feeling of a comprehensive experience which once made up the undeniable flair of ancient market places and high-roads not only as lively shopping centres but as places of communication and leisure activities before urban traffic destroyed that image. It is quite understandable, therefore, that many new shopping malls in the city outskirts have taken over this concept proved in its proper time and adapted it to the present conditions and necessities. The new and still expanding designer outlet centre near the small district



capital of Neusiedl (2001 pop. 5898) in Burgenland demonstrates this development impressively.

So, why not make profit of this new trend in old town centres? How such a strategy could function will be demonstrated very briefly by the example of the district centre Waidhofen an der Ybbs (2001 pop. 11.686) in Lower Austria.

### Waidhofen an der Ybbs – A Case Study

Waidhofen, situated on the northern edge of the Alps, benefited during the Middle Ages from the region's abundance of water power, wood for charcoal production, limestone and iron ore from local layers and from the famous and nearby deposit of the "Styrian Erzberg" (iron mountain). Ore-processing, manufacturing and trade established the town's wealth and prosperity throughout the centuries until the decline of Austrian heavy industry together with the retrogression as a regional centre of trade and traffic after World War II. This motivated the city-council to act. On the basis of the results of an urbanistic competition in 1999 the city started the conversion of the leading project, the reorganization of the existing (historic) structures. The goal was some kind of "face-lifting" of the old town centre to revive its fading importance as an urban focus of commerce, residential functions, leisure activities and entertainment to attract people from in - and outside the town, of all social classes old and young.

The so-called "Stadtprojekt" (city-project) was presented to the public. Participation of local citizens in decision making was promoted. To stimulate this process the burghers were made aware of the quality and historic design of their urban environment. Different locations and points of interest, attractive ensembles and solitary buildings were deciphered, exhibited to the people as components of an imaginary stage, and reintegrated into their hereditary field of force. Thus sensitivity to the characteristic structures of urban spaces was roused and their perceptive integration into the surrounding landscape could be achieved.

The leading principle of the planning architect Ernst Beneder (2002), the reorganization and utilization of existing structures was supplemented by the political keynote to create a living space where scale and proportion correspond to the demands and expectations of the population.

The project consisted of several planning elements, which could be realized individually without encroaching upon the concept as a whole.

One of these elements was the city's historic moat dating back as far as to the year 1400. It was filled up in 1806 and since then it has been used as a partly private green space. By reopening the moat it will be possible to build an underground car park well adapted to today's topographic and structural situation. As an additional effect it will be possible to foreshadow the former moat by leaving a narrow split open in the terrain.

Another element is the deeply excavated gorge of the river Ybbs which in former times protected the city on one side but also functioned as a living space in the broadest sense for the city dwellers. The social background for traditional water related activities vanished in the course of time. Our modern attitude of everyday life does not concede a nostalgic or romantic view back. What can be done, however, is to open the citizens' eyes and appeal to their conscience as to the complexity and vulnerability of the urban cultural landscape. So some suc-

cessful attempts have been made to partially reopen the inland scenery by the river to the public. Display cases and diagrams were placed at distinct points of interest offering specific sight relations to the sharp cornered edge of the medieval city or to the bizarre conglomerate walls of the river valley, thus didactically supporting a better understanding for the interwoven structures of the natural and man-shaped environments.

Designing the inner city was perhaps one of the most challenging planning elements. Two long lenticular spaces (Oberer and Unterer Stadtplatz) dominate the medieval market town. They are fringed by rows of unpretentious burgher houses without any significant architectonic hierarchy and yet representing compact ensembles including constructive elements of Gothic architecture. To make them visible as integrative components of modern shops, offices and flats was the intention of the planning architects. Keeping business running and giving citizens a perspective for living in the downtown area demanded the creation of a new identity for the urban core based on its historic flair, but seen with the eyes and adapted to the needs of present and future users. Business, trade and commerce are inseparably connected with traffic. The inner-urban traffic problem, therefore, was one of the crucial questions to be solved especially if the creation of a future-orientated city marketing concept was strived for. The package of measures aimed at countering the problems created by urban motorized traffic and intended to alleviate the disadvantages suffered by the city dwellers in many small towns is directed towards establishing large areas where traffic volume is almost completely restricted.

Such stringent measures frequently turned out to be counterproductive. Private cars today are integrative, mostly unabandonable constituents of modern living. To ban them from inner-urban business zones has caused many shop keepers, offices and inhabitants to leave the centres. To steer clear of such a development the city council of Waidhofen an der Ybbs has decided to open the city centre for local motorized traffic except during market hours, holidays and night time. Urban communal space is kept open, free from unremovable urban furnishings like shrubs, flower beds, benches, advertising signs, etc. Thereby the views of the passers by and foreign visitors are directed towards the visible signs of the historic urban heritage and motorized traffic, whenever allowed to flow through the narrow roads at reduced speed, finds its way more or less unimpededly.

Water is a fundamental element of human life. Many especially small towns express this fact visibly either by being situated by a river or lake or by using water as an architectonic and aesthetic component of urban design. Both factors can be perfectly demonstrated by the historic town of Waidhofen an der Ybbs, firstly by re-establishing the accessibility of the valley floor of the river Ybbs and thus re-integrating it into urban life, and secondly by installing two new fountains each on one of the two most important market places. The fountains follow a multifunctional concept: they serve traffic calming, they are urban landmarks and meeting points, their water may be used for refreshment and since water is kept in motion it also stimulates human senses (colour and light reflexes, noises, or cooling effects).

Waidhofen an der Ybbs, therefore, gives us a good example of a successful future orientated city management project: A sound and conscientious prepara-

tion and information policy by the planning architect together with the whole city council transgressing traditional ideologies and political party limits, respect for each other's wishes, desires and fears, consideration of the specific requirements of urban dwellers, urban business life, and urban traffic and, above all, the conviction that the conservation of the architectonic achievements of a splendid historical past, if prudently adapted to the needs of modern economy and urban life can keep the centres of small urban places alive.

It must be noted, however, that a policy primarily directed towards the (economic) survival of small historic centres demands largely renouncing the establishment of new shopping centres on the urban fringe.

### LOWER AUSTRIA'S INITIATIVE FOR URBAN RENEWAL

In 1992 the province of Lower Austria started an initiative for urban renewal which primarily focuses on small towns, since the biggest city of the province, its capital city St. Pölten hosts roughly 50,000 inhabitants (2001 pop. 49,272). There are only six more cities exceeding 20,000 inhabitants. Six cities (Bruck an der Leitha, Eggenburg, Retz, Waidhofen an der Thaya, Waidhofen an der Ybbs, Wiener Neustadt) were also selected to test the project as to its efficiency, feasibility, and acceptance by the population. For this purpose planning consultants were appointed to the cities, and urban renewal offices were set up with the necessary infrastructure. A primary goal of the new institutions was supporting the population with self-aid projects.

Each town developed a concept for its own urban renewal (s. Waidhofen an der Ybbs) and tried to include its burghers from the very beginning in the whole planning process. The latter suffered from the fact that there hardly existed any practicable models for the renewal and future development of small urban places throughout the EU. Therefore Lower Austria worked out her own concept. Its structure consists of four levels:

- a) the provincial coordinating office is responsible for the basic conditions and coordination of all projects as well as for the distribution of promotional subsidies,
- b) accompanying process management through offices of the Lower Austrian provincial government and the national office for the protection of ancient monuments,
- c) the urban renewal offices of the six test communities function as liaison offices between the citizens, city councils and provincial administration,
- d) each urban renewal advisory board is composed of representatives of citizens, communal politicians and administration. It controls and coordinates the single project.

This model turned out quite practicable and it underlined the importance of communication and information. Future urban development depends to a high degree on initiatives from the citizens themselves, on their chance and willingness to articulate their needs and problems and to actively contribute to their solution. A city will master its future only if its citizens have got visions for the future.

Lower Austria has spent 53,6 Mill. Euro on urban renewal projects since 1992. Fig. 1 informs about the percentage of investments in various fields of communal interest (Trauner 2002).

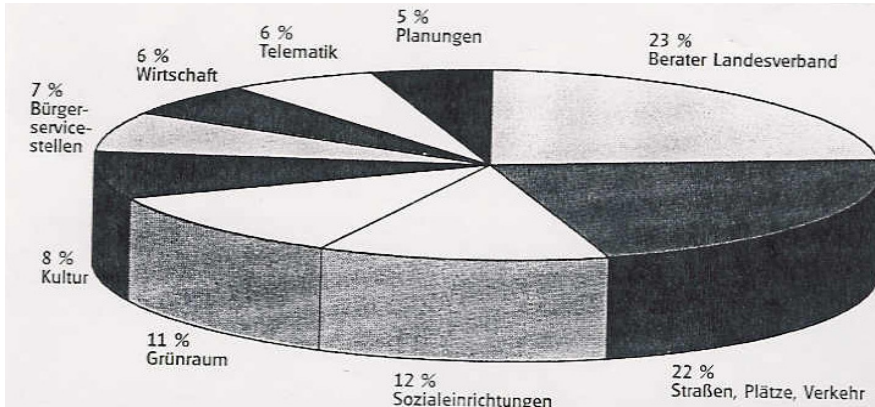


Fig. 1. Percentage of investments in various fields of communal interest (53,6 Mill. Euro until 2001)

## INTEGRATED AND PARTICIPATORY PLANNING AS A BASIS FOR SUSTAINABLE URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Integrated and participatory planning provides the basis for successful urban development. The historical heritage represents our collective memory, identity, and the specifics of each urban place. It should be promoted and preserved as a “key contribution to the humanization of the city” (Petroncelli Macchiaroli 2002).

The concentration on and utilization of signs of the historic past and tradition can strengthen and stimulate local cultural vitality, foster the civil society and create a meaning full alternative to lacking or underdeveloped central functions as a basis for sustainable urban evolution.

There is no doubt about the fact, that the position and role of small urban places within a greater regional context depend substantially on their functional equipment and domain (cf. Elsasser und Bühler-Conrad 1998). Their evaluation as living places goes hand in hand with their attractiveness as providers of jobs and consumer goods. Many small communes therefore are seeking their fortune primarily in increasing the number of their inhabitants because surpassing a certain level means higher financial support from the state. They strive for new citizens and investors very often heavily competing with neighbouring towns instead of cooperating and planning in a participatory way. Urban as well as regional planners intending to realize the sustainable values in space should aim at integrating the various competitors on the regional level when pursuing their goals of development in order to reduce possible conflicts between the single interests of each community or social group.

Defining criteria and principles to be universally referred to for working out future layouts for urban development becomes crucial together with a harmoni-

ous urban planning policy, which deals with the population's needs in an efficient and equitable way. In this sense the social-cultural and historical background should be seen as resources and hinges of production activities and locations. This demands a careful reconsideration of historic centres not only to avoid their destruction from a mere preservative point of view, but also to value properly the potentials for the realization of future economic strategies.

Facing the many negative outcomes of an ever-increasing globalization and homogenization process planners, urbanists, and even politicians show an increasing interest in the historical roots of their spheres of responsibility. Following this path they are facing two different challenges: firstly they have to preserve the quality of the historic resources and avoid their inadequate "consumption" and secondly they have to define and guarantee their best possible exploitation and increment through integrated use.

The role attributed to small urban centres within the Austrian urban network until the recent past more or less was that of general neglect. Yet, small towns not only represent the lowest level of the urban hierarchy, they are not free of problems, they are not only dormitory towns for emigrants from bigger cities thus being integrated into an overall suburbanization process, they do not only function as reserves for private and commercial building land and they do not only depend on larger places, but they are also important parts of a regional, national and even international (referring to telematics) urban network. To guarantee its functioning implies the most favourable usage of the locational advantages of each partner-city integrated into the network.

Compensation for regional disparities for many decades was the strategic goal of regional planning aiming at establishing equal conditions of living and economic prosperity (cf. Finke 1997, Wolf 1996). It has turned out, however, that the essential purpose of regional planning the creation of jobs and equal distribution of income can hardly be achieved in reality. It is not necessary to discuss the reasons for this fact. They are commonly known and also true in the competitive situation of small urban places.

In Austria a change of terminology can be observed during the recent past when discussing problems of regional, rural, and urban development. Instead of speaking of "regional disparity", a term which is mostly used in a negative sense, terms expressing a far more positive picture like "regional identity", "regional peculiarity", or "regional consciousness" are promoted for the future (cf. Kanatsching et al. 1999).

Claiming integrated and participatory planning as a basis for sustainable future urban development complies with the above demand. The individual historic backgrounds of Austrian small towns, in many cases dating back hundreds of years, must be seen as a real chance for their evolution. The Historic heritage is a means that already exists and is just waiting to be used. Despite its individual local, place-related character, it can also function as a regional trade mark.

Small urban places do have a positive future perspective even in a globalizing world if they succeed in making use of their advantages, which must not only be seen in urban networking, in openness towards new technologies and strategies, in preserving a unique quality of life, but also in rediscovering the

historic past as a means for establishing social security, economic prosperity, environmental sustainability, political stability, cultural identity and local peculiarity.

### CONCLUSIONS

There is an increasing interest to be observed also among geographers in the actual problems and future prospects for the development of small urban centres in Austria. One possibility promising good success could be a new city-marketing strategy focusing on outstanding examples of historic urban structures. They should not only be viewed as a means of recollecting historic consciousness, but also as a chance to foster economic development, stabilize urban population structures, secure environmental sustainability and thus to bestow on small towns an appropriate position within a greater regional urban network.

Special measures in Lower Austria powered by the provincial government have shown impressively how initiatives for urban renewal like that of the small district capital of Waidhofen an der Ybbs (2001 pop. 11,686) can contribute significantly to the improvement of the urban quality of life. The clue to this success is an integrated and participatory planning policy which attributes citizens and investors an adequate and dynamic role in the urban evolutionary process.

Small urban places can face a prospering future if their citizens, political, economic, and socio-cultural decision makers think positively and concentrate on shaping the identity, peculiarity and consciousness instead of disputing and complaining about their fate.

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Walter Z s i l i n c s a r

## PERSPEKTÍVY MALÝCH MIEST V RAKÚSKU

Multidisciplinárne a cezhraničné prístupy, ktoré sa zaoberajú perspektívami malých mestských centier v Rakúsku, sú čoraz dôležitejšie. Medzi dôvodmi dominuje túžba mnohých občanov po transparentnosti, strach z globalizácie, narastajúce spoločenské rozdiely medzi obyvateľmi veľkých miest, bezpečnosť, dôvera, ľudskosť, politika miest orientovaná na občana atď.

Vynorila sa otázka, či a ako môžu malé mestá ťažiť zo svojej historicko-hospodárskej situácie a podmienok rastu, keďže niet pochýb o vplyve jednotlivých osôb alebo inštitúcií na minulosť, prítomnosť a budúcnosť miest. Pritom sa smerovanie malých miest opiera o externé riadiace mechanizmy, ako je napríklad šíriaci sa globalizačný proces. Štúdia prináša diskusiu o kladoch i záporoch spojených s týmto procesom na príklade malých štajerských miest. Pozitívne perspektívy budú zväčša závisieť na schopnosti a pripravenosti malých miest participovať na aktivitách v regionálnej a urbánnej sieti, ktoré zahŕňajú veľké mestá ako centrá excelencie, inovácie, vzájomnej výmeny tovaru, ľudských zdrojov a myšlienok.

Historické dedičstvo predstavuje aj budúce šance na rozvoj malých miest, ako to demonštruje prípadová štúdia dolnorakúskeho strediska obchodu a priemyslu Waidhofen an der Ybbs. V tomto prípade sa istými kozmetickými úpravami, ktoré majú oživiť rolu starého mesta ako centra, úspešne čelí narastajúcej miestnej a regionálnej konkurencii nových predmestských nákupných stredísk.

Krajská samospráva v Dolnom Rakúsku vyvinula v roku 1992 iniciatívu pre mestskú obnovu, zdôrazňujúc pritom význam komunikácie a informovanosti o budúcom vývoji miest. Integrované a participačné plánovanie sa považuje za základ úspešného a trvalo udržateľného vývoja. Pozícia a úloha malých miest značne závisí na ich funkčnom vybavení a prítlačivosti ako poskytovateľov pracovných miest a spotrebiteľských tovarov. Malé mestá majú priaznivú perspektívu aj v globalizovanom a urbanizovanom svete. Ak sa im podarí využiť svoje výhody, môžu zaujať primerané postavenie v ur-

bánnej sieti, ponúknuť vysokú kvalitu života a opätovne objaviť svoju historickú minulosť ako viditeľný znak zvláštneho postavenia v rámci regionálnej a národnej urbánnej krajiny.

Preložila H. Contrerasová