

Summary

ÖROK-PUBLICATION NO 198 - “AGENDA FOR URBAN REGIONS IN AUSTRIA”

Background: The “ÖREK 2011”

The Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK) created a strategic framework for action for the long-term spatial development in Austria when it adopted the Austrian Spatial Development Concept (ÖREK) 2011. In Strand 4 of the document entitled “A Cooperative and Efficient Framework for Actions”, the “Development of an Agglomeration Policy for Austria” is defined as action 4.2 and “Establishment of a Cooperation Platform ‘Urban Region’” is defined as task A 4.2.2.

The themes of the ÖREK Partnership “Cooperation Platform Urban Regions”

The work of the ÖREK Partnership “Establishment of a Cooperation Platform ‘Urban Regions’” has concentrated since the year 2012 on the implementation of these two themes defined in ÖREK 2011. The Austrian Association of Towns acted as leader and the partners were the Federal Chancellery Dept. IV/4 Coordination, the Länder of Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Styria and Vorarlberg, the Austrian Association of Municipalities, the cities of Vienna, Graz, Salzburg as well as Lienz and Ternitz, PGO Planungsgemeinschaft Ost, Stadt-Umland-Management Wien-Niederösterreich (SUM) and Regionalmanagement Graz/Graz-Umgebung. The group discussed the concerns and challenges facing urban regions today, and which measures need to be taken to support these regions in coping with these challenges.

Urban regions as “real spaces”

The majority of the population lives in urban regions. The areas in which many people live and interact are regions that cross the borders of municipalities, Länder and cities. Currently, urban regions are not sufficiently defined as a separate type of region or established as separate planning and action level among policymakers and administrators. This is also because urban regions are functional spaces that extend beyond political and administrative borders, and in their nature as “functional spaces” (having flexible borders) these do not fit into the historic political and planning cultures that have evolved. The array of Austrian urban regions ranges from small and medium-

sized regions to polycentric agglomerations and the metropolis of Vienna. The balance between rural areas and urban regions is just as necessary for a balanced spatial development as a balance and the equilibrium between core city and catchment area, because the urban region = city + catchment area.

Due to the frequent lack of clarity with respect to political responsibility for urban regions, politicians often find it difficult to support urban regional cooperation. The administration entities responsible for planning are aware of the pressure for action, and cooperation is already very intense in a number of organisations. However, such cooperation calls for political support and the willingness to implement actions, in particular, if the themes that need to be dealt with are difficult.

The goals and contents of the “Agenda for Urban Regions in Austria”

The goal defined by the ÖREK Partnership is to reveal the concerns of city regions and to define the main points of an Austrian policy for urban regions – and also agglomerations - in the “Agenda for Urban Regions in Austria”. Thus, proposals for measures are to be developed for the regional actors, but, above all, for policymakers at the federal and regional levels in order to ensure that urban regions remain functional in future, and to encourage and support collaboration so as to simplify administration and improve efficiency. For local decision-makers, the “Agenda” is designed to serve as a source of ideas and also as a basis for discussion and negotiation with neighbouring municipalities and the superordinate administration levels.

Part 1 – “Agenda for Urban Regions in Austria” – Recommendations of the ÖREK Partnership “Establishment of a Cooperation Platform Urban Region”

The first part of the publication contains recommendations which from the standpoint of the members of the ÖREK Partnership contain the key points for an Austrian urban regional and agglomeration policy. When drafting the recommendations, the ÖREK Partnership members used the findings collected during the review

of the expert opinion on cooperation among urban regions in Austria (Part 2 of the Publication).

The following key points have been defined by the ÖREK Partnership for an Austrian policy for urban regions and agglomerations:

1. Urban regions take action – in their own fields of action and define priorities

Urban regions must master challenges in many different fields and priority areas that cover the entire spectrum of spatial development.

Action *Improve Mobility and Accessibility*

The motto for the future in this case is “Mobility Across Borders”. The implementation measures are

- The targeted promotion of mobility partnerships for urban regions,
- The development of demand-side oriented standards for developing public transport,
- The definition of public transport quality classes for the entire territory
- Collection of a tax for connections to transportation

Action *Prudent Use of Free Space and Natural Resources*

The following measures are to be implemented under the heading “Securing free space for everyone”:

- The establishment of landscape accounts in urban regions,
- The design of regional parks,
- The regional harmonisation of building densities,
- The preparation and networking of energy concepts for urban regions.

Action *Sustainable Development of Settlements and Business Locations*

Improved interaction of cities and municipalities within urban regions to “achieve more for less money”. Measures in this field of action are

- The consistent application of planning instruments for “high quality internal development”,
- The harmonized development of business locations within urban regions,
- The definition of objective areas in urban regions,
- The establishment of regional advisory boards for design and planning,
- The collection of taxes for connections and maintenance work for undeveloped building land.

Action *Supporting Diversity and Cohesion*

The objective of this field of action is to “offer space for the diversity of lifestyles”. Measures in this field of action are

- Making more affordable housing available,
- The development of integration schemes for urban regions,
- The creation of spaces for encounters,
- The development of schemes for public and social organisations.

2. Urban regions have instruments – to plan and develop

Austria's urban regions already use a series of planning instruments (e.g. intercommunal spatial development concept, regional master plans) and platforms. These have different designations in the various Länder and regions, but are all oriented on spatial development and intercommunal/regional cooperation. Many positive experiences have been made with informal planning processes. However, especially considering the widely divergent starting situations within the urban regions and with respect to “difficult” themes (e.g. plant location, zoning for building, traffic generation) it has become clear that there are limits to voluntary collaboration and that binding instruments and rules are necessary.

To achieve a more effective use of planning instruments and processes, the following aspects should be taken into consideration

- Urban regions should be given more attention in cases where planning has a spatial impact and projects are implemented by the federal government,
- Investments should have a greater orientation on planning for urban regions,
- Urban regions should be firmly defined as areas of action for regional planning,
- Schemes and urban regional frameworks concepts should be used as an integration instrument for planning
- Adjust statutory planning standards and the practice of municipalities of sharing information and of inclusion to the special requirements of urban regions.

3. Urban regions have governance structures – to support cooperation among their actors

The establishment of governance structures in urban regions enables steering and coordination to adapt to the needs of functional areas. This makes it possible to cope with spatial challenges jointly, to bundle resources and encourages the willingness of the actors in urban regions to cooperate. There are diverse structures for collaboration in urban regions already in place in Austria that could be exemplary; for example, Stadt-Umland-Management Wien-Niederösterreich, Stadtregion Graz and various cooperative ventures in the Rhine Valley in Vorarlberg.

The following measures were identified

- The (further) development of cooperation and organisation forms in urban regions,
- The adjustment of the legal framework for urban regions at the federal and regional government levels,
- Proactive and extensive information and harmonisation in planning and in projects of spatial relevance,
- Planning “at the urban level” within planning and administration associations.

4. Urban regions learn – and engage in systematic knowledge management to achieve this

Although Austrian urban regions are very diverse and different from each other, they nonetheless face many similar challenges. Urban regions ready for the future understand themselves to be learning regions open to dialogue and the sharing of knowledge, and at the same time, work to make collaboration more binding. Urban regions learn together and from each other.

Knowledge management measures are

- The continuation of the conference “Urban Regions Day” and to increase its relevance for politics,
- Establishment of a cooperation and learning platform for urban regions,
- Monitoring for urban regions, and
- Cooperation with existing networks and platforms

5. Urban regions are funded – and have the means to create incentives

The financial support for collaboration in urban regional matters between cities and municipalities supports the development of a common perspective and a common scope of action.

Urban regions may be funded through existing financing and assistance instruments, if the following is achieved:

- Ameliorate the “spatial blindness” of the financial aid programmes through specific applications with a spatial reference,
- Create a spatial reference for revenue sharing,
- Further development of models for balancing uses and burdens on urban regions,
- Financial support for planning processes and models for urban regions,
- Position urban regions in EU financial aid schemes.

6. Urban regions are on the political agenda – and engage in awareness-raising and lobbying to position themselves and achieve defined areas of competence

Urban regions have to become established in the thinking and actions of the actors involved in spatial development but also for actors in politics and administration as experts in order to reduce the potential for rejection, create acceptance for urban regions, engage in common urban regional policy and in this way also assume political responsibility for urban regions.

The key measures needed to put urban regions on the political agenda and thus support them are:

- Broadly communicate the findings of the ÖREK Partnership among policy-making bodies,
- Clarify the political representation of urban regions,
- Anchor policy for urban regions in government programmes,
- Strengthen the coordination function of the federal government,
- Create a strategy plan (road map) for the operational implementation of policies for urban regions,
- Create space for thought and communication in urban regions, and
- Launch the programme *stadtREGIONALE* as a stimulus and driver.

Part 2 – Materials volume: Expert opinion on cooperation among urban regions in Austria

The publication “Expert Opinion on Urban Regional Cooperation in Austria” contains a summary of the findings of a well-founded scientific work based on an investigation of three sample regions (Vienna-Lower Austria-Burgenland, Villach, Bludenz-Bürs-Nüziders). A team from the Technical University/Department for Spatial Planning/Faculty for Regional Planning and Regional Development and mecca consulting was commissioned with the research. Sibylla Zech and Hannes Schaffer had academic responsibility for the project; Nina Svanda from the Faculty of Regional Planning and Regional Development acted as project leader. The findings of many experts and actors from regional, federal and Länder bodies were taken into account that were willing to contribute their expertise at workshops, interviews and discussion during the conference “Urban Regions Day”. The key aspects compiled in the recommendations of the ÖREK Partnership for an Austrian policy for urban regions and agglomeration are supplemented in the monograph by further aspects illustrated using numerous examples from Austria, Germany and Switzerland. Thus, the regional actors in the regions have access to a pool of examples from practice.