

# Summary

## ÖROK SERIES NO 201 - EXECUTIVE SUMMARY INCLUDING CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report presents the findings of the “Interim Evaluation” of the ÖREK 2011 (Austrian Spatial Development Concept 2011) commissioned in 2017. The following aspects were reviewed:

- Content of the ÖREK 2011 (topicality, themes)
- ÖREK 2011 actions and implementation targeted
- Implementation process of the ÖREK Partnerships to date

Various methods were combined to answer the evaluation questions, for the purpose of reflection on the ÖREK implementation process, and for drafting recommendations for a new ÖREK for the 2020s. The methods included telephone interviews and personal interviews of members of the Standing Subcommittee and actors at the political level, two online surveys (one for the members of the ÖREK Partnerships and one for the expert public), desk research and internet research, workshop elements from the meetings of the Standing Subcommittee, a wider ÖREK network meeting, and information talks with the ÖROK Office.

### Overview of implementation

#### 22 of 36 tasks dealt with

The overview shows that by mid-2017 the majority of the ÖREK 2011 tasks had, in fact, been dealt with. ÖROK took direct action in 22 of the ÖREK 2011 tasks (= 61%). A considerable share of these activities

changed the system of spatial development by either implementing legal measures or defining and applying expert standards. In eleven further task areas (= 31%), the activities in the meaning of the ÖREK 2011 were carried out without any direct implementation initiative by ÖROK. Only with respect to three tasks (= 8%) were there no activities worthy of mention in the meaning of the ÖREK 2011.

#### **Highly useful: established a common understanding and developed concrete applications for policy and legal decision-making processes**

The usefulness of the results of the ÖREK Partnerships is assessed as highly useful by the members. The majority of the Partnership members interviewed and all Standing Subcommittee members know of concrete application and implementation examples. The effects span the range from the attainment of a common status of knowledge and a common understanding to concrete themes and applications in policy and legal decision-making processes. The expert public does not follow the manifold effects of the ÖREK implementation processes as closely. Only few of the persons interviewed knew of concrete application examples. This shows that a large part of the implementation work takes place in the background. In order to enhance the visibility of this work, more public relations activities would be recommendable.

Fig 1: Result of the survey on implementation intensity of the ÖREK 2011 task areas, as at September 2017

Assessment of implementation intensity	Mentions
Measure(s) integrated institutionally into the overall system	10
Results with an impact at the informal/expert level	3
Activities completed with visible results	4
Activities currently under way	5
Activities with a reference to ÖROK	0
Activities initiated independently of ÖROK	11
No activity worthy of mention to date	3

Source: ÖIR based on a document analysis, interviews and online interviews

## Attainment of the targets

### Closer cooperation among ÖROK members

Cooperation within the ÖREK Partnerships works very well. The experience gained in the nine Länder is shared, thereby creating synergies. Additionally, inputs come from the ministries and the experts invited.

The fact that cooperation works well is also due – apart from the Partnerships that function as expert platforms – to the type of results. The Partnership members do not need to implement the results indirectly or directly. Predominant is the search for solutions based on expertise. Implementation is not mandatory or legally binding and this creates a setting that is supportive of cooperative discussions within the Partnerships. Increasing the legally-binding nature of the recommendations would detract strongly from the achievements that make the final paper suitable for consensus. The outcome would be mutual blockades when drafting the results.

### Higher awareness among expert public, but not always optimal among the wider public

Awareness among the Partnership members was definitely higher within internal administration structures. However, this does not automatically mean that awareness within the broader expert public is higher or stronger. The results of the ÖREK Partnerships only partially meet the requirement of reaching the expert public and influencing expert discourse.

As regards a broader expert public, the sector struggles with the sometimes high complexity of the themes of spatial planning, which are often hard to communicate to the media as these are often only interested in short-lived headlines and simple messages. ÖROK members often expressed their desire to be more involved in raising awareness and in public relations work.

### Greater interaction within decision-making structures of the political system would help increase political acceptance of the ÖREK Partnership results

The inclusion of the actors at the level of political decision-making is a crucial success factor for the implementation of ÖREK Partnerships. Currently, this is achieved to varying degrees depending on the Partnership, theme or policy area. A decisive factor for successfully communicating the results to ‘politicians’ is to secure their interest in the contents and results before the start. In order to increase interest

and political acceptance of the ÖREK Partnerships, it is absolutely necessary to obtain a ‘political mandate’ for the support and participation in the Partnership of the involved ÖROK members as early as possible. Political acceptance is made much easier by involving the strategic decision-makers in a timely manner in the implementation phase.

Crucial for communicating the results to ‘politics’ is being able to take advantage of the political windows of opportunity through the skilful and strategic placement of themes. Therefore, it is necessary to anticipate themes and to prepare these in advance so as to have them ready when the right time comes for communicating them to politics. To this end, the recommendations of the ÖREK Partnership must be reduced to the essential core messages.

### Higher awareness achieved for solutions to key issues of spatial development that integrate the expert and sector levels

The objective of raising awareness for a solution to the key issues of spatial development that integrates the various expert and sector levels is viewed by the expert public, and also by the Partnership members, as having been very well achieved, with the expert public assessing the situation slightly less favourably than the Partnership members. This leads one to conclude that the ÖREK Partnerships have a greater internal effect within the group of the members. This assessment was also voiced in the interviews and at the network meeting at which the members demanded a greater involvement of the municipal and regional levels, and also of the political decision-makers.

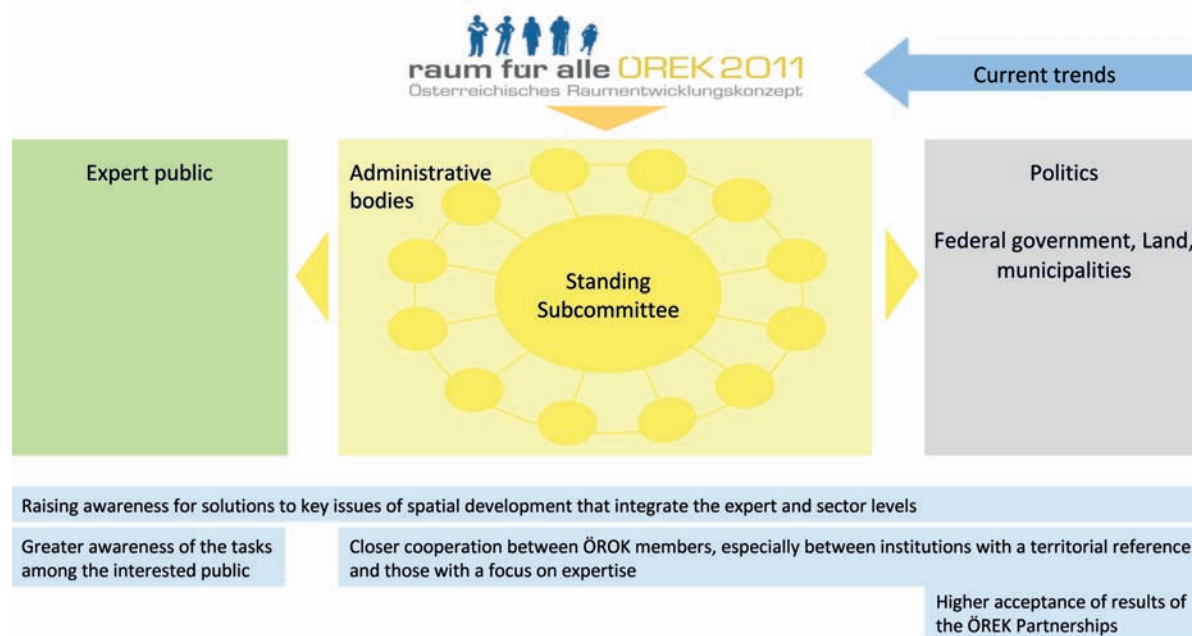
### Assessment of the ÖREK implementation process

#### ÖREK Partnerships/platforms highly appreciated as implementation instrument

ÖREK Partnerships are the core element of ÖREK 2011 implementation. They are viewed as a suitable form. A Partnership is an opportunity for experts to share views and network in a neutral setting. Their inter-sectoral composition and the mutual interaction of experts and administrators are assessed as fruitful. The formal framework of the Partnerships (defined goals and content, partners and members) as well as a clearly defined timeframe is viewed as a strong point. The clear timeframe creates gentle pressure to achieve concrete results within the specified time and to finalize the discussions with presentable results. The support provided to the Partnerships by the ÖROK Office is assessed as highly professional and helpful. It helps the lead partners concentrate on the themes.

Fig. 2: The three main target groups of ÖREK implementation and the expectations in the results of implementation

## Expectations in results pursuant to ÖREK 2011



### Expectations in results pursuant to ÖREK 2011 – Management and Implementation Process

Source: ÖIR

Experience has shown that there are Partnerships which tend to focus on discourse among experts and those for whom the final ÖROK recommendations are more important.

Therefore, in the preliminary phase of an ÖREK Partnership it is always a key issue to clarify the goals, the means used to attain them, and which members and contacts are required to achieve them.

#### **What is lacking at present is an ex post assessment of the effects after finalization of a Partnership**

As regards the long-term effects of the findings of the Partnerships, there is currently no monitoring to evaluate the policy impact also after finalization of a Partnership. Useful would be an ex post review of the ÖREK Partnerships within the scope of reflection rounds in which the question is discussed of how the results have been implemented and what their effects are.

#### **The ÖROK events (impulse meetings, workshops and infrastructure day) are viewed positively**

ÖROK events such as the ÖREK impulse meetings, ÖREK Partnership workshops and the Infrastructure Day as well as the event Urban Region Day, which emerged from an ÖREK Partnership, are all well received and used as communication formats. They are viewed as means to disseminate the findings and involve larger groups. More events of this type are desirable, also in the regions.

#### **Administration well embedded, but inclusion of smaller, rural areas harder to achieve**

The involvement of the relevant actors is generally assessed as a success, especially because the Partnerships include representatives from the various sectors, public entities, interest groups and also experts. The Partnerships are perceived as too focused on administration. Moreover, often the same persons are attending.

The fact is often commented that although smaller rural municipalities are invited, it is hard to achieve their active participation. Therefore, important partners are missing in implementation. What is called for in this context are further efforts to encourage active participation by small, rural municipalities, for example, mayors, heads of administrative entities and heads of building authorities, town planners, regional managers, the Chamber of Civil Engineers and also civil society representatives.

### **Role of Standing Subcommittee for ÖREK implementation process greatly appreciated**

Participants assess the work of the Standing Subcommittee in the monitoring and steering of the ÖREK implementation process highly positively, especially because the format makes it possible to conduct objective discussions and to reach agreement on the individual positions at an early stage.

### **Assessment of ÖROK products**

#### **ÖROK recommendations (as “rediscovered” products) are generally assessed as good although the language contains a bit too much jargon**

ÖROK recommendations are highly esteemed by administrators, by the expert public and policy-makers. They contribute to the development of a common awareness, represent the “state-of-the-art” in the field, and are viewed as a source of knowledge that can be cited. The recommendations are described as “guidelines for action on specific themes”, “as reference works” and also as “information on points of view”. The recommendations also have an influence on politics, because advisors use them as a point of reference when developing policy recommendations and to support their reasoning. Their brief format and plain language are viewed as “very practical”. The recommendations on specific ÖREK themes are easily accessible to a broader public when presented in the form of brochure.

The non-binding nature of the recommendations is a greatly appreciated principle, because this makes it possible to specify contents in more specific terms without the need be circumspect on certain interest positions.

A critical view states that the language of the ÖROK recommendations is too academic, too abstract and too long for communicating with certain target groups (e.g. municipalities, politicians). When communicating the findings to the political (communal) level, to local and regional planners and to other

interested parties, an additional translation is required. It would be important to reduce the recommendations to their core messages. Also in the future, ÖROK recommendations should be prepared only for the key themes.

### **ÖROK Atlas is popular, well-known and appreciated**

The ÖROK Office provides support for communicating the findings in various formats, which include the spatial planning reports and the ÖROK Atlas (see: [www.oerok-atlas.at](http://www.oerok-atlas.at)). These formats are well suited to help experts stay abreast of the latest developments. The ÖROK Atlas is well-known and is also used. The effort made to prepare the information broken down by Land is appreciated.

### **The ÖROK Spatial Planning Report is hardly read**

The recognition and utilization rates for the Spatial Planning Report are much lower than for the ÖROK Atlas. Politicians have expressed their desire to obtain in-depth analyses and data for specific themes upon request to support the work of the expert departments.

### **Themes for the final ÖREK 2011 implementation phase and beyond**

The findings of the interim evaluation reveal that the ÖREK 2011 with its four thematic pillars (regional and national competitiveness, social diversity and solidarity, climate change and resource efficiency, cooperative and efficient structures for action) cover the thematic fields of spatial planning in Austria very well and are still current. However, the evaluation of future themes in online surveys and interviews shows that work needs to be even more focused in some areas.

Based on this conclusion, the following thematic priorities are recommended:

#### **→ Climate change – adjustment strategies and avoidance measures:**

Climate change requires harmonisation across sectors due to the manifold points of reference and interdependencies. Austria will have to deal with these issues also in the 2020s, because of (inter) national agreements and strategies (e.g. SDG objectives, energy strategy). Themes in this context include

- Adjustment to the consequences of climate change: tourism, farming, urban planning (heat islands, cooling, green space design, ...)
- “Sustainable mobility” – climate-neutral mobility

- de-carbonization of mobility and energy production.
- Territorial impacts of the energy system in the de-carbonization of energy production
- Integrated view of settlement development and energy supply
- **Demographic change and basic services in rural areas:**  
Demographic change in structurally weak regions poses a major challenge for infrastructure: vacancy, erosion of purchasing power and under-use of infrastructure. Future themes for an ÖREK are:
  - Strategies to combat out-migration (young women, active population) and for managing immigration flows
  - Maintenance of basic infrastructure
  - Spatial development strategies for “shrinking” regions
  - “Smart” development of rural areas
  - Consequential costs of “retreating” infrastructure, services, etc. in peripheral regions
  - Local basic services using mobility beyond fossil fuels – securing mobility in wider areas
- **Space-saving settlement development:**  
Settlement development that uses little space is a classic theme of spatial planning and is still highly topical. This subject will continue to be important for spatial planning in the 2020s, in particular, in agglomerations where the management of population growth is an issue. Future themes for an ÖREK are:
  - Internal development, revival of town centres, re-use of settlement, commercial and trade spaces no longer needed
  - Reduction of urban sprawl and large-scale commercial locations in the periphery
  - Truth in cost (infrastructure and mobility costs) and a higher awareness of the consequences of land use in the form of urban sprawl
  - Coordination of settlement development and transport (access to motorways, access to public transport/public transport capacities)
  - Access and/or use of building land reserves
  - Settlement pressure in urban agglomerations: demand for residential housing, mobility, migration/integration
  - Ensuring high quality free space (retaining accessibility and usability) and high quality farming land
  - Harmonizing spatial planning objectives and financial assistance (residential housing subsidies, and similar)
- **Digitization:**  
The theme of digitization has not been addressed within the scope of the ÖREK up to now. It has

been identified mainly by politicians as a future theme. As the change process of digitization will affect mainly rural areas entailing enormous challenges, a more thorough discussion of the opportunities and risks of digitization for spatial development should be initiated within the scope of the ÖREK. The relevant questions would be:

- Spatial and regional challenges and the effects of digitization
- Opportunities for regions created by the regionalization of innovation policy – the opportunities of innovation-based approach
- Effects on commerce and town centres

## Recommendations for the planning process

### Retain “bottom-up” implementation concept in Partnerships

ÖREK Partnerships are well received and should therefore be continued in their current format as a central element of ÖREK implementation. The proven “bottom-up” approach when setting up ÖREK Partnerships should be retained. This approach makes it possible to focus energy and resources on the themes actors also want to address, and therefore, on subjects with a high probability of achieving results. The inter-sectoral and multi-level composition and the average number of members of the Partnerships should not be changed. What should also be retained are the formal requirements and especially the limited period of existence of a Partnership, because this creates gentle pressure to produce presentable results within a certain time.

The approach of the ÖREK Partnerships to produce results without “implementation pressure” should be retained, because it creates a climate that facilitates discourse among experts. This makes it possible for the members to develop solutions without insisting on specific positions and interests and enables implementation through various paths and at varying speeds by the members within their own spheres of influence.

### Municipalities and other target groups should be involved more closely in the Partnerships from the start

In the preliminary phase of an ÖREK Partnership, it is – as planned – always necessary to clarify the goals of the Partnership, the means to be used to attain the goals, and which members and contacts are required. What is essential in this context is a definition of the target groups. When defining the concept of a Partnership, the issue should be addressed of whether or not to involve external experts and stakeholders such as regional

managers, planners, the Chamber of Civil Engineers and also civil society representatives – apart from representatives of administrative bodies and interest groups. Above all, special attention should be paid to strategies for involving the municipal level. All of these questions must be clearly answered at the start of a Partnership.

### **Greater accountability of the members of the Partnerships and the Standing Subcommittee for disseminating the results**

The members of a Partnership and the members of the Standing Subcommittee are the first key persons who disseminate the results of an ÖROK Partnership. Every member should therefore define its own format for communicating the findings of the ÖROK Partnership within its own institution. Useful in some organisations are regular meetings or other formats for communicating information within the administrative bodies. This would also support the communication of findings to the persons preparing political decisions.

In the assessment of the evaluation team, it would also be useful to strengthen the Standing Subcommittee as a discussion group so as to give its decisions on concrete themes more weight. An extensive presentation of the findings of the Standing Subcommittee meetings and the following discussions – also to discuss any subsequent steps to be taken – should become a fixed element of the “Partnership Cycle”. However, this should not constrain the absolutely necessary function of the Standing Subcommittee as a “supervisory board”.

### **Feedback rounds with political bodies and “policy-ready” drafting of the findings**

To increase interest and the political acceptance of the ÖROK Partnerships, it is absolutely necessary to obtain a ‘political mandate’ from the involved ÖROK members as early as possible to obtain their support and participation. The type of mandate will depend on the respective institution.

Often, ‘windows of opportunity’ open up that make it possible for themes to be effectively introduced into politics. In order to be able to take advantage of such ‘windows’, the themes should be anticipated and prepared so that they are ready at the critical moment.

The political decision-makers have very little time and short attention spans due to the manifold tasks they must engage in. The findings of the ÖROK Partnerships must therefore be translated into their

language and rendered more concise (complex themes summarized on one page in three to five points.) For this task, there are special “translators for politics”. These are, for example, Standing Subcommittee members and persons from the administrative bodies, federal ministries and regional councillors (Landrat). These translators usually need abbreviated versions (8 to 15 pages) which they can turn into short and concise papers.

### **Secure resources for communicating the findings**

The question of how the discourse will proceed among the expert public should be considered already during the creation process. If the findings are to have a public impact, the time needed and the resources must be planned already when starting on the project outline. It would be feasible to reserve 1/3 of the planning time for this purpose.

For communication with the expert public, further specific information activities must be planned to stimulate discourse. These are, above all, events and publications. Current ÖROK events such as the ‘Infrastructure Day’ or the event ‘Stadtregionstag’ (Urban Region Day) organized by an ÖROK Partnership are well received as communication platforms and should be continued and expanded. When drafting publications, the question of the target groups must be clarified in order to draw conclusions for the communication format to be used.

New elements of the internal work of the Partnerships In order to render the work of the Partnerships more efficient, supplementary communications formats such as webinars are also possible. Moreover, consideration should be given to the possibility of inviting persons with controversial views and experts (from abroad) as “agent provocateurs” as a way of stimulating discussions.

### **Selective application of ÖROK recommendations**

The ÖROK recommendations that result from the findings of selected ÖROK Partnerships should be retained in their form of Policy Agreements between ÖROK members and as a source of knowledge for the expert community. The recommendations should continue to address core issues of spatial planning as up to now.

For every ÖROK recommendation it should be clarified if non-expert target groups are also to be addressed by accompanying brochures. Supportive formats must be developed and created to this end.

### **Reflection rounds and ex post monitoring to secure effects of the findings**

A reflection round with the members is recommended when a Partnership is finalized for the purpose of ascertaining the learning effects, reflecting on these and securing them. In order to also monitor the long-term effects of the findings of the Partnerships, it is recommended to hold an expert reflection round every five years to evaluate the policy impact after the close of a Partnership.

### **Recommendations for ÖROK products**

#### **Keep the ÖROK Atlas up to date and close data gaps**

The interim reflection round gave the ÖROK Atlas good marks: it is well-known; it is used and should therefore be retained in its current form. In the future as well, special attention should be paid to maintain the data in the Atlas current and to close any gaps in the data.

#### **Modernize the Spatial Planning Report Austria: data-based statements on spatial development**

The Spatial Planning Report is not used by a large part of the expert community and by around half of the Partnership members, and in some cases, it is not even known. However, from the perspective of the evaluation, the design and presentation needs to be modernized. An overhaul should also include greater interconnectedness with the ÖROK Atlas, the systematic monitoring of the legal system as well as giving more weight to data-based statements which can be cited. The Spatial Planning Report should be available for downloading from the ÖROK website.

#### **ÖREK for the 2020s**

The interim reflection round shows that the thematic priorities of the ÖREK 2011 are still topical. The

format and organization in pillars, fields of action and tasks has proven useful.

It would also be useful to screen the themes in a broadly-based participative process in order to update the fields of action and the tasks. In this context, the expert public, the target groups of the municipalities and regions should be involved in addition to the ÖROK members. To broaden the breadth of the visions, it is recommended to invite innovative persons with controversial ideas and positions from outside the ÖROK community (e.g. researchers of future trends, political think tanks, European observers). The search for themes within the scope of the interim reflection round yielded mainly 'more' and 'more intensive' treatment of current themes.

Both aspects will be needed for a new ÖREK for the 2020s: continuing attention to the permanent topics of spatial development (climate change, land use, out-migration from rural areas) as well as anticipation of new topics (digitization, e-mobility) with as of yet unknown consequences for spatial development.

The interim reflection round also revealed that there is still 'room for more' in implementation: in certain themes, at the policy level and at the level of the regions and municipalities. Therefore, it is recommended to focus on the implementation process when preparing the next implementation cycle.

The implementation Partnerships are suitable instruments for this purpose and most certainly need to be retained. The issue here is how to better include smaller, rural municipalities and regions as well as how to achieve a more efficient transmission to the political level. The communication and implementation of the findings must become a key element of the Partnerships in the future. Monitoring implementation status three to five years after finalization of a Partnership would help to achieve learning effects.