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Steering Spatial Development in the Vienna Agglomeration

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Abstract: After the falling down of the “iron curtain” Vienna starts to grow again. It is now a metropolitan area with about 2.6 Mio. inhabitants. Vienna is surrounded by Lower Austria, which is one of the nine countries (Bundesländer) of Austria. Spatial Planning is based on the Austrian Constitution a complex matter. The Federal State, the Countries and the Municipalities have competences in Spatial Planning. Thus, in the agglomeration we are confronted with different spatial planning legislation, instruments and institution. In this situation basically three instruments have been developed to steer spatial development in the Vienna agglomeration: Lower Austria has passed two legally binding spatial development programmes as framework for spatial development in the municipalities around Vienna. Besides that, Vienna and Lower Austria established a “Stadt-Umland-Management” (North and South). This management is an association acts as a cooperation and network platform with no legal competences. Just recently a new “regional master plan” has been elaborated in the North of Vienna. The Master Plan was drafted in a participatory approach. A steering group with representatives (mayors) of all Municipalities and the Government of Lower Austria was formed. All planning steps have been discussed and decided involving the Municipalities and formally approved in the so called “Regional form” where all Municipalities and the Lower Austrian Government have a vote. More specific this plan is a spatial framework for the municipalities in terms of building land for housing, economic activities and protection of green zones of regional importance. The paper concentrates on experiences made in in the drafting process of this new “regional master plan” in the Vienna agglomeration area North of Vienna.

Keywords: Regional development, Planning instruments, Process design

1 Spatial Planning in Austria – a comprehensive introduction

A multi-level governmental system defines the framework for spatial planning in Austria. The Austrian Constitution (article 2) identifies Austria as a federal state, which is divided into nine federal Länder (sg. Land). The Austrian Constitution (articles 10–12 and 15) regularizes the distribution of competences between the national (Bund) and the Länder scale for all affairs within the state. All affairs that are not stated explicitly to the national scale through the Constitution (articles 10–12), like forestry, mining, cultural heritage protection, water supply, fall into the remit of the Länder (article 15), like spatial planning, environmental protection, construction laws, kindergarten issues. In the 1960’s and early 1970’s, the nine Länder passed building regulations and spatial planning laws, which were amended several times. Vienna has only just approved the building regulations. The content and structure are naturally very similar. In addition to (general) spatial planning objectives, they set the legislative framework for regional and local planning policies. Austria has no particular Spatial Planning law or regulation at state level.

Municipalities are enabled by the Constitution (article 118) to fulfil all affairs, which are in the exclusive and predominant interest of their own local territory, like local planning and local building inspections. In those matters, Austrian Municipalities are only the subject of control of higher level institutions, but not the subject of higher level directives.

Thus Spatial planning in Austria is a complex matter, where Bund, Länder and Municipalities make space-relevant decisions.

2 Instruments used to steer spatial development in the Vienna agglomeration

The author was involved in a strategic regional planning process in the north of Vienna. The project was contracted by the Lower Austria Government as pilot project and implemented by MECCA environmental consulting and the Vienna University of Technology, Department of spatial Planning, Centre for Regional Planning and Development. More specific this plan should be the spatial framework for the municipalities in terms of building land for housing, economic activities and protection of green zones of regional importance. Lower Austria has already forty years of experience in drafting regional plans. The first Regional spatial development programme was approved 1982. This kind of programmes are legally binding regulations, are passed from the Lower Austrian Government and are developed in a “top down” oriented approach. In the agglomeration of Vienna there have been approved two Regional Development Programmes - Area Vienna North and South. Beside these formal programmes Lower Austria has started in the eighties to promote cooperation in spatial planning with regional managements. In a joint initiative of the provincial governments Vienna and Lower Austria two so called “Stadt-Umland-Managements” have been established. More particular, one in the North of Vienna and one in the South of Vienna. These managements act as a cooperation and network platform with no legal competences. Their main task is to activate the cooperation and harmonization of the involved Lower Austrian communities and Viennese districts together with two Länder concerning regional planning matters as well as specific cross border issues. Experiences with these two approaches showed often a gap between these two instruments. Thus as part of the pilot project "regional master plan" a new constructive and goal-oriented cooperation of municipalities, regions and countries is tested. Under the motto "Cooperation on Equals" a new approach to regional planning was developed. The basic idea of this pilot project “Regional Master Plan” was it, to combine advantages of formal and informal instruments. It's not about an additional instrument to be developed, but to use the elements of the existing instruments. The Master Plan was drafted in a participatory approach. A steering group with representatives (mayors) of all Municipalities and the Government of Lower Austria was formed. All planning steps have been discussed and decided involving the Municipalities and formally approved in the so called “Regional form” where all Municipalities and the Lower Austrian Government have a vote. The result is a spatial planning document drafted in common sense with legally binding provisions and recommendations for spatial development within the region.

3 Specific planning task in the North of Vienna

The project area is one of the fastest growing areas of Austria. In the last years new motorways (A5, A22 and S1) have been built and an even more dynamic development is expected. How to ensure coordinated spatial development in this region was one of the basic questions?

The population development in the north area of Vienna from 1981 to 2011 was already very dynamic. During this period, a growth of plus 34% was recorded. The population forecast to 2025 is positive; the population will increase by another 14%. A total of 2011, approximately 108,200 people lived in the northern area of Vienna. The population is unevenly distributed on the communities where Pillichsdorf with 1,093 inhabitants and Stockerau with 15,500 inhabitants.

Till the year 2025 a growth of 15,000 people in the northern area of Vienna is expected - the region has a total of 123,300 inhabitants. According to the master plan, the residents should be directed to the well supplied and accessible places. The northern area of Vienna should become a well-structured urban region, where main municipalities are clearly visible, small villages maintain their identity and natural potentials are protected.

3.1 Building land and financial savings

Urban sprawl and land consumption is steadily increasing; this aspect will be a major challenge for the region in the future. It should be avoided that low-density development spread over large areas.

The indexing and maintenance costs vary significantly depending on location within the community and on the basis of density of development. Development costs per housing unit in a central location amounts to around a quarter of the construction costs of a housing unit to be developed at a new settlement edge. Development cost for settlements of multi-family dwellings are less than one-third compared with the same number of housing units in single-family homes. The differences in the maintenance costs are even more serious.

The area consumption and the cost of housing development can be reduced by using denser forms of housing in already dedicated areas according to existing land use plans. Following the objectives of the Regional Master Plan in terms of density and land mobilization, only 50 ha additional building land would be needed. The indexing and maintenance costs could be significantly reduced.

Following the prevailing trend of development another 270 ha of additional building land would be necessary. This means: The Master plan “saves” 220 ha land and give room for development for future generations. The cost of urban development and infrastructure maintenance are greatly reduced.

3.2 Dense growth in central locations

Central locations are characterized by good facilities with kindergartens, schools, local suppliers, etc., and a good accessibility in public and in private traffic. Thus the growth in central places should be stronger than in locations that are less well-equipped or not reachable. In addition, the social infrastructure facilities and public transport stops should be within walking distance of new living areas. Dense forms of living in the catchment area of local facilities are desirable.

The denser and stronger growth in central locations not only ensures that many residents take advantage of the facilities, but also ensures a critical mass of buyers. Local shops, train stations, high schools, etc., are only utilized if enough residents live in its catchment area. The locations north of Vienna were divided on the basis of the existing facilities and their accessibility in three location categories (see figure 1):

Regional Development Centre

- Supplementing Centres
- Villages with local driven Development

Table 1. Target values for settlement development

Objectives Master Plan	
Population Development	Growth according location categories: 60% in Regional Development Centre 30% in Supplementing Centres 10% in Villages with local driven Development
Mobilization rate building land	1/3 of already designated building land according existing land use plan
Density	Density according location category (average new constructions / building land: 80 Inhabitants / ha 60 Inhabitants / ha 40 Inhabitants / ha

Source: Regionale Leitplanung Nordraum Wien, 2013

3.3 Mobilization of building land

Just under a quarter (22% or 936 ha) of land dedicated to residential construction in North Vienna area is undeveloped. Communities dedicate land in particularly favourable sites as residential land. If these are not built and the demand for residential land still rises, additional areas are dedicated, this time in not so good situated areas. Residential development is shifting to areas that are less suitable where a development was not originally planned. Also built, but uninhabited land pose potential for residential development in good locations. Land remains uncultivated or unused when they are seen as long-term investment or "stored" for close relatives (e.g. children).

This approach will benefit individuals; the settlement structure - which influences the coexistence of the entire city - is negatively affected. It created vacant lots, extinct town centres and sprawling settlement patterns.

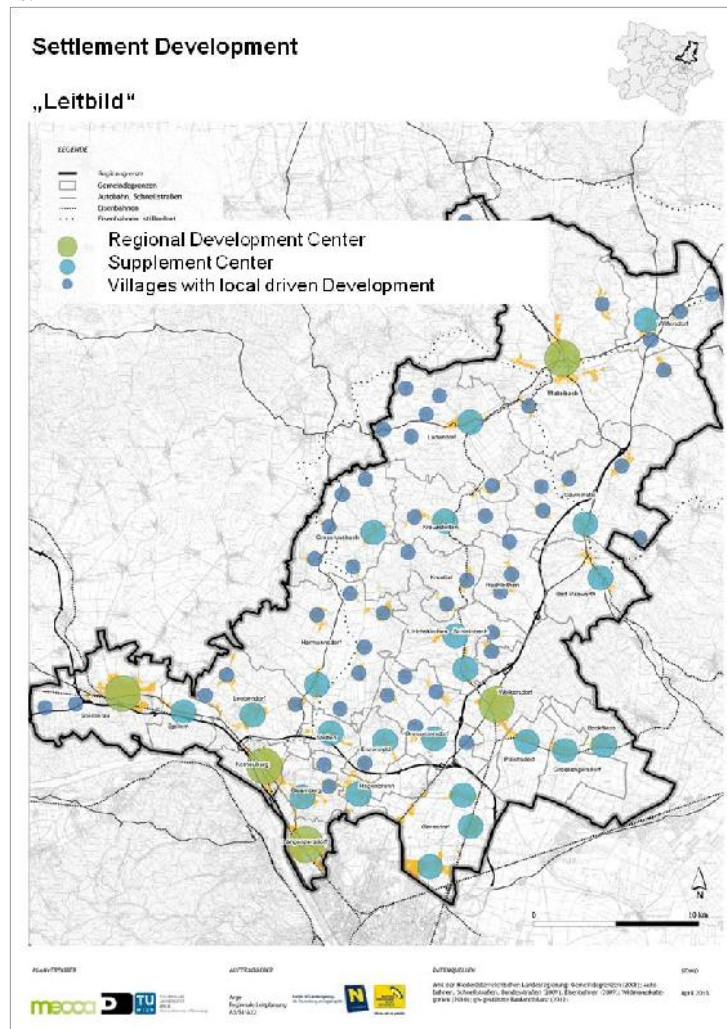


Figure 1. Regional Master Plan, Settlement Development

Source: Regionale Leitplanung Nordraum Wien, 2013

In order to counteract this development communities endeavour to use vacant or unused plots. This overhang of building land is a result of inconsiderately land use planning of the 70-ties and 80-ties. Today it is very difficult to mobilize this land. There the government of Lower Austria considers new instruments for effective mobilization and a special fund, helping the communities to buy and develop this unused land. The establishment of a land management for the whole region is considered.

3.5 Protection of the environment

The existing green space in north Vienna area, especially in view of the proximity to the city of Vienna, is of great importance. The landscape has a huge potential and guarantee for the quality of life in the region. It is not only recreational area for the local population but also popular destination for visitors and an important argument for many immigrants. To avoid the damage of landscape by rampant development structures, to minimize land consumption and to ensure the networking of habitats is another important aim.

The preservation of landscape elements has not only an ecological or aesthetic function; landscape elements are also important for orientation in a region and give identity. Ground edges or forest edges often represent the boundaries of municipalities.

The increasing population due to the easy accessibility, the good services within the region increases the pressure on the landscape. If the region develops as in the past decades, about 270 ha of building till to the year 2025 would be necessary to accommodate the growth.

Therefore the master plan updated landscape elements worthy of preservation and regional green zones already prescribed in the regional spatial development programme around Vienna. All elements and zones have been adjusted in the course of the current situation. The Municipalities have reflected the draft and incorporated corrections.

4 Embedment and Implementation

The contents of the Regional use planning are embedded in the planning documents of the municipalities and the country of Lower Austria:

- On the basis of declarations, the municipal councils take appropriate decisions on the acceptance of the content of the master plan and their implementation in local planning.
- The government of Lower Austria will take elements out of the master plan and concretize them by passing a legally binding Regional Spatial development programme according Lower Austrian Spatial Planning Law.

In addition to the mandatory requirements and objectives that are embedded in the planning documents of the country of Lower Austria and Municipalities, additional measures have been developed to support implementation. The implementation measures (see table 2) can be divided in:

- Regional Coordination Process (RCP)
- Regional Support Mechanism (RSM)
- Legal and Administrative Adaptations (LAA)

The Regional Coordination Process (RCP) includes measures that address the further coordination within the region, the country and the region and beyond (e.g. the City of Vienna). To test the effectiveness of the Master Plan, regular monitoring is proposed. The Regional Support Mechanism (RSM) contributes to achieve the objectives set out in the Master Plan. It is based on the principle of reciprocity: In the effort to achieve the objectives of the Master Plan, they are increasingly supported by the country.

Legal and Administrative Adaptations (LAA) includes adjustment that are related primarily to changes in the law. In particular, the lack of instruments to secure necessary building land and the lack of effective tools for land mobilization, limit the municipalities to control effectively the use of land.

The administrative adjustment needs concentrates on measures to enhance the cooperation within the different thematic units in the administration of Lower Austria. Politics, administration and funding should be in line with the objectives of the Master Plan.

5 Flexibility and implementation

Conditions change and mathematical models differ from the situation on the ground and cannot consider all local characteristics. For these two reasons, great care has been taken that Master Plan insures a flexible implementation. To insure that the main objectives are implemented legally binding documents are necessary. Nevertheless, some of the provisions of and guidelines can be adapted to reflect changing conditions, lack of implementation options or inaccuracies in the theoretical target values for settlement development. The criteria's for the three location categories Regional Development Centre, Supplementing Centre, Villages with local driven Development, are legally binding through Regional Spatial development programme. The classification may change, if the circumstances change crucially (e.g. new infrastructure). The calculated land requirements for each village as well as the density and growth objectives are enshrined as benchmarks in the Regional Spatial development programme. These are goals that have to be reached by the municipalities. Correspond the calculated model assumptions not to reality or cannot be reached (e.g. lack of instruments for the implementation), a written explanation has to be send to the planning authority of Lower Austria to deviate from the target values.

Table 2. Implementation measures Master Plan

Master Plan Objectives	RCP Regional Process	Coordination	RSM Regional Support Mechanism	LAA Legal and Administrative Adaptations
Location Categories	Ongoing Coordination		Infrastructure Cost Calculator	Provisions for Drafting Spatial Programmes
Values for growth and density	Evaluation Spatial Programme		Land Management System	Density categories and building types
Settlement Borders	Evaluation Regional Concept Region Walkersdorf		Guideline for Development of Settlement Centres	New utilisation categories
Operating Areas	Evaluation Operating areas Region "10 for Vienna"		Profiles for Operating Areas	Differentiation of Residential Building Support
Regionale Green Zones	PR and Awareness Raising		Cooperation Guidelines for Operating Areas	Coordination of funding instruments
Landscape elements			Advisory Board for Building Culture and Urban Development	Instruments for Building land mobilization
			Workshops und Excursions	Building fund
			Architecture Competition	
			Urban Development Award	

Source: Regionale Leitplanung Nordraum Wien, 2013

6 Conclusions

Time will show if this new approach is finally successful. The Regional Master Plan was formal approved by the Regional Form and the implementation started. The Municipalities have to revise their local spatial planning documents and the government of Lower Austria is finalizing the draft of a new regional spatial development programme. A new spatial planning law is also under preparation. About the differentiation of residential building support an intensive political debate started.

What can be said till now is that the commitment for this new Regional Master Plan is very high. Through the intensive involvement of the Municipalities the awareness for the importance of regional plan to steer the expected development grow extremely. On the other hand it became that clear that new instruments and strategies on the level of the country are necessary to enable municipality to overcome the spatial challenges of the future.

For us a planning team the whole process the elaboration process was very intensive. A lot of time and good will from all other actors was needed to contribute to the planning process. Finally it is to say that that the process is not finished. The proposed implementation measures, Regional Coordination Process, Regional Support Mechanism, and Legal and Administrative Adaptations have to be started and implemented to secure an efficient landmanagement. This landmanagement process needs political support and ongoing good will from all actors.

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5. Notice: Parts of this paper was presented at the AESOP conference 2013 in Dublin
6. More information of the project “Regionale Leitplanung” at <https://sites.google.com/site/nordraumwien/> (only in German)