

Regional cooperation in the metropolitan area of Vienna

Summary

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About the Study:

Topic:	Regional cooperation in the metropolitan area of Vienna
Contracting agency:	City of Vienna – municipal department 50 group of responsibility für housing, residential building and urban regeneration
Contractor:	SORA Institute for Social Research and Consulting, Wien
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Area studied:	Vienna and Lower Austria
Methodology:	Qualitative semi-structured interviews with 10 mayors of municipalities in Lower Austria, the Director of Planning (City of Vienna), 4 experts in the fields of academics and urban planning, and 4 organisations dealing with cooperation in the area.

Introduction

Regional cooperation is becoming ever more important within a dynamically developing metropolitan region. Many new challenges are arising especially when it comes to housing and settlement development. How can affordable and high quality housing in a good home environment be provided for the growing population?

Successful cooperation is first and foremost dependent on shared concerns and challenges among cooperation partners. Therefore, this study takes a close look at the goals, interests and future perspectives of the various municipalities within the metropolitan region. In addition, the forms and areas of ongoing cooperation activities in the region as well as the potentials for further cooperation are evaluated.

To answer these research questions, 19 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with mayors, officials, experts and representatives of organisations dealing with cooperation have been carried out. On this basis, the study presents findings on

- the various conditions conducive for or hindering regional cooperation,
- the future perspectives for regional cooperation in the areas of settlement development and housing,
- and the promising starting points for fostering such cooperation.

Shared goals and interests

The municipalities of Lower Austria in the surroundings of Vienna perceive the predicted population growth and changes linked with this growth as the central challenge for the next years. In this context, the municipalities are primarily concerned with the adaption and planning of traffic, infrastructure, economy and spatial planning.

The budgets of the municipalities play an essential role in all of these fields. The municipalities prefer a moderate influx of population that would make it possible to meet the infrastructural and social structural challenges as well as to preserve the identity and character of the municipalities.

Between the municipalities within the metropolitan region there is a broad agreement on what the most important challenges are. Also, the ideas on future development in order to improve the quality of living for a growing population are similar. However, the objective of developing affordable housing within the whole metropolitan region is more strongly expressed by the city of Vienna.

Forms and areas of cooperation

From the perspective of the municipalities in Lower Austria, the most important areas of cooperation are infrastructure (technical and social), economy, work and tourism, traffic, quality of life and administration. Cooperation is especially interesting for the municipalities when it promises to bring about a reduction of the financial, human resource and administrative cost and when it contributes to the satisfaction of the population and the community. Existing activities of cooperation are therefore often focused on operative and functional aspects and can be characterised as pragmatic and efficient rather than innovative or visionary.

Cooperation between the municipalities of Lower Austria and Vienna

The cooperation between the municipalities of Lower Austria and Vienna is shaped by the asymmetry of a city with 1,8 million inhabitants and various smaller cities as well as small and very small municipalities. Therefore, besides the different lifestyles and expectations of the urban and rural population, differences in political power and administrative structures have to be taken into account. Despite many initiatives to build trust, there is still a latent suspiciousness between Vienna and the municipalities of Lower Austria. The administration of Vienna is often perceived as an obstacle for efficient cooperation by the municipalities.

Trans-regional cooperation structures

The work and effectiveness of the cooperation structures **PGO** (Planungsgemeinschaft Ost), **VOR** (Verkehrsverbund Ost Region) and **SUM** (Stadt-Umland-Management) are consistently rated as positive by the interviewees in this study, and no one demanded to fundamentally restructure these cooperation structures. The experts observed, especially through the work of SUM, an increase of informal communication and trust within the region. Looking at the PGO, the potential to develop a common vision of the future is emphasised. In their cooperation with VOR, municipalities would prefer faster administrative procedures and an increased consideration of their interests.

Potentials for cooperation

The experts interviewed for this study state that regional cooperation within the metropolitan area of Vienna until now has focused primarily on **topics** where **agreement was easy to reach** between the stakeholders, e.g. leisure and recreation, nature or tourism. This approach is evaluated positively because it allows the various stakeholders to get to know each other and to **build trust** so that a base is laid for further and more intense cooperation. Now it is necessary to move a step forward and tackle the more “difficult” topics such as traffic, site development and housing.

Especially for the municipalities, the topics **traffic and mobility** are key areas for future cooperation since they can only be tackled together and basically force the regional stakeholders to cooperate. Further topics which carry great potential for cooperation in the view of the municipalities are technical and social infrastructure as well as the development of operational facilities. The municipalities classify the issue of **settlement development** not as a preferential topic of cooperation. According to the experts interviewed it will only become an area of regional cooperation if awareness for a shared functional area arises in which the population dynamics can only be regulated together.

The increased frequency of communication and coordination between the various stakeholders is seen as beneficial by interviewees. In general, they argue that the **awareness** of regional cooperation has slowly but visibly increased over the past decades, i.e. the stakeholders are more open-minded and informed about cooperation.

An **essential difficulty** for regional integration within the metropolitan area of Vienna is the fact, that the border between the city and the outer conurbation area is **at the same time a municipal and federal state border**. The constitutionally regulated division of competences within the Austrian federal system therefore entails differing legal bases within the metropolitan area. Also, the current regulations on financial equalisation and the local tax ("Kommunalsteuer") are perceived as rather obstructive than conducive for cooperation.

These constitutional regulations entail a more significant role to the state level to bring about cooperation in the metropolitan area. Even with a high willingness of the single municipalities to coordinate and cooperate, the **support and commitment on the state level** is crucial.

Next steps

There is a basic consensus among regional stakeholders that cooperation across municipal and state borders is reasonable and desirable. Against the backdrop of the preceding analysis, the following starting points can be identified to foster such cooperation:

- **Political commitment and a political agreement** at the state level on the degree of regional integration is needed. Only on this basis, management structures, forms of organisation and cost-benefit compensation systems can be (further) developed. To think and act across administrative boundaries is essentially influenced by the cost-benefit compensation systems in place.
- Rather than establishing new structures, the **coordination** between the existing structures as well as the integration of new structures into the existing ones should be aimed at.

- The **joint development of a future vision** for the metropolitan region should be aimed at by drafting a common and binding trans-regional development concept.
- The **continuation and intensification of trust-building measures** which support informal exchange are part of a longterm process and an essential basis for cooperation.
- Taking the **asymmetry** in size between Vienna and the other municipalities into account, the interface between municipalities and the Viennese administration is crucial for future cooperation and for reducing the transaction costs especially for smaller municipalities.
- In order to build more **affordable housing** within the metropolitan region, a joint fund could be established where municipalities are invited to submit project proposals.