Urban-rural linkages enhancing European territorial competitiveness - Mini case study on tourism

Short description of the setting

The two capitals Bratislava (Slovakia) and Vienna (Austria), ‘twin cities’ at a distance of solely 60 kilometres, together with a number of other vibrant and attractive towns such as Brno and Győr are the engines of an economically and culturally expanding European region. Being the two capitals in Europe the closest located to each other, they span a region intertwined across national borders. The potential to develop as an integrated metropolitain area has increased especially since the accession to the European Union and membership of the Schengen travel area. Already now, the strong dynamics of Bratislava are affecting the rural Austrian towns especially in the south of Bratislava (Wolfsthal, Berg and Kittsee) through increased demand for new settlements, leisure and recreational areas. The formerly rural villages tend to show features of suburban towns. However, protected natural areas such as the national park “Donau-Auen” between Bratislava and Vienna demand for a well-balanced strategy for the future development of Bratislava and the towns in the surrounding area.

Innovative activity

With a series of projects and joint initiatives, the Slovak capital Bratislava and the neighbouring Austrian region have entered into a process of intense cross-border co-operation to harmonise the development in the greater region. Governors, county presidents and mayors of the border quadrangle between the federal provinces of Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland, South Moravia Region, Bratislava and Trnava Regions as well as Győr-Moson-Sopron County had agreed upon the joint establishment and support of the Central European Region CENTROPE in 2003 as a new cross border economic space and place to live in for more than six million people. Aiming to develop the region as an integrated area of metropolises with decentralised settlement structures and a graduated ranking of cities, co-operation was sought not only between cities and regions to use benefits in the fields of economy, culture, education and social infrastructure, but also in form of partnerships between cities and hinterland to integrate the exclusive features which make up for a fully equipped region. Natural resources and the cultural heritage of the region shall be protected, managed and used in a sustainable way. To this end, the partners elaborated a common understanding about the prevailing fundamentals for planning, an agreed definition of detailed strategic development goals, a concept of an organisational structure to ensure long-term success and co-operative projects in thematic clusters of economy and labour market, spatial structure, and natural space, tourism and culture. A special focus was set on the potential of green spaces and landscape along the border (Petrzalka area) and a master plan on “landscape, recreation and tourism” jointly elaborated for Bratislava and the villages in the Austrian hinterland. The defined objectives and projects such as a routing and accessibility concept serve to activate the touristic potential of the region. At the same time, the landscape potential shall be ensured by a green corridor along the border, which ought to avoid urban sprawl between Bratislava and the Austrian hinterland in the south. Further functions and potentials of the area were defined for organic agriculture, profitable agriculture, tourism on health and culture as well as on viniculture – with respective synergies between these. With the bicycle route network as a main basis, the master plan is aiming to connect the region's potentials and make previously unnoticed qualities visible.

The project JORDES+ (Joint regional development strategy for the Vienna-Bratislava-Győr Region) had served as one stepping stone for the set-up of this cross-border working group. It was formed by the “Planning Community East”, a joint organisation of the Austrian State governments
of Burgenland, Lower Austria and Vienna for agreement, coordination and elaboration on relevant spatial questions in the Austrian “Region East”, with partners in Slovakia and Hungary.

Specific studies in the project had indicated high dynamics in new settlements and sites in and around Bratislava, increasingly affecting the Austrian neighbouring cities to convert from sleepy border towns to attractive suburbs of the Slovak capital. The project KOBRA+ was thus set up in order to help the Austrian towns prepare for this new role and emboss their special cultural and ecological qualities and identities when planning vis-à-vis the present and envisaged demands. The “Planning Community East” together with the State Governments of Burgenland and Lower Austria as well as partners in Vienna and Bratislava prepared the ground for an expert discussion of existing local and regional plans to define and map functional zones and regional focus measures. Especially the mission statement on the “Biosphere region and green centre” was considered and advanced, by assessing areas and sites for their special relevance – with regards to ecology, settlement development, raw material extraction, agriculture, industry - from a national, regional and community perspective. The resulting spatial mission statement was agreed upon as fixed constant and building block for the strategy on the development of the Vienna-Bratislava region.

In a next step, the contents of the urban development plan Bratislava were coordinated with the development concept and tourism master plan, and co-operation intensified between the Planning Community East, Bratislava city administration, regional development associations and municipalities.

### Competitiveness contribution

The expected growth of Bratislava and its impacts on the neighbouring towns had stimulated the intensified communication between different actors in the region to discuss challenges and opportunities. Within a series of projects, a framework for co-operation between the city of Bratislava and the regions and towns in the rural Austrian neighbourhood was consolidated, even across national borders. Partners agreed on an overall spatial development vision to serve as a framework of reference for future development, planning for and harmonising between urban growth areas and accentuated rural towns by help of an integrated concept for leisure and tourism. This master plan on landscape, recreation and tourism serves as a key instrument to coordinate the demands from the dynamic Slovak capital on settlement areas and recreational areas with the identities of the adjacent towns and characteristics of the protected green areas. Ultimately, the protection of these special cultural and ecological qualities and identities can make up for an attractive touristic and recreational image of the region and create synergy effects in the shaping of a profile for the Bratislava-Vienna region with high recognition value. In future a joint platform of the Austrian hinterland-municipalities and the City of Bratislava will ensure the ongoing coordination in matters of development and regarding joint projects. Shared investments for the implementation of the tourism master plan are intended to create benefits (in form of income taxes) for Bratislava as a city with attractive recreational “facilities” and the Austrian towns and local tourism enterprises as well.

### Contact and references

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