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## Organizational Concepts for Intensified Regional Cooperation in the Vienna Region

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# **Organizational Concepts for Intensified Regional Cooperation in the Vienna Region**

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presented at the Vienna ERSA-Congress 98

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## **Organizational Concepts for Intensified Regional Cooperation in the Vienna Region - A Proposal**

*„The key to change is organization...*

*Organization is the instrument that transforms thoughts into  
authority and intent into action“<sup>i</sup>*

### **1 Introduction**

This article presents an organizational proposal for more democratic, strengthened, developmental cooperation in the Vienna region. It is based on systematic research into several city/region cooperation systems. It also takes into account the specific characteristics of the Vienna area. This proposal is intended as a suggestion or a basis for discussion, not as an imposition on the responsible politicians and administrative authorities.

#### **1.1 Reasons and Motivation Behind this Proposal**

Cities and their surrounding areas often lack the political structures necessary to function as a single regional entity. As established federal structures are, realistically, not alterable, additional authorities, territorial networks and platforms must be created.

Politicians increasingly use the term “Vienna region” to refer to the region comprising of Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland. The previous term, Eastern Region, is appropriate only in the context of Austrian interstate geography, but somewhat unsuitable in light of EU east enlargement.

Critical examination has shown that non-cooperation and indecision is a operational policy followed by existing organizations. Furthermore plans inherently carry the

peculiarity that they are not followed. Above all the danger exists that regional planning becomes an academic exercise for regional experts and a privileged elite.

Does one therefore abandon all types of plans, and devote oneself exclusively to current affairs? For the Chamber of Labor these are important reasons for pursuing a new concept. The circle of participants in the regional cooperation process must be extended, other viewpoints acknowledged, and differing groups equally integrated into the planning process.

Many or most projects go only as far as analysis and strategy development. The critical point is the transferal of concepts from retrospect into foresight. This is exactly the point where changes must actively be initiated. Many projects get to the starting point and are then abandoned to live their own life.

## **1.2 Political Culture - a Risk Factor?**

How should process oriented projects for regional development interact with political structures? What position should they themselves assume? There are no patent recipes. The Chamber of Labor initiative shows some (small) success after 5 years. Two working groups on regional policy were formed. Their members are nominated from the respective provincial parliaments for one year periods.

One working group is on “Transportation and Community Enlargement” and has, in the mean time, posted its first working results. The second group on “Economics, Establishing Enterprises, Employment and Telecommunication”, has yet to produce visible results.

The Chamber of Labor, as a representative of the working class will continue to press for increased cooperation in the Vienna region. Skilled and sensitive management is necessary to control complex cooperation processes. Non-involved professional guidance is imperative. Last but not least we need people, people to impart and impel motivation for change, people to communicate the necessity of cooperation.

## **2 Major Problems Facing Regional Cooperation**

Prior to sketching a proposal for reorganization, this is a brief outline of the key problems hindering joint work in the Vienna region.

### **2.1 Centralized Regional Planning**

At present all joint regional policy and planning takes place in the PGO (Planungs-Gemeinschaft Ost, Eastern Planning Council). The PGO comprises of the politically responsible officials of Vienna region. These are the heads of provincial government, the members of the provincial cabinet responsible for finances and the members responsible for regional planning for Lower Austria, Vienna and Burgenland. Joint regional planning officially exists only at the provincial level (in contrast to Switzerland or Germany). The elected parliamentary representatives (i.e. the provincial legislative body), are not involved. The local councils, in many cases responsible for implementing policy, do not take part in the planning process and have no formal rights. Regional interest groups, the Chambers (Economic, Labor, etc.) the regional development funds for Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland, and the Vienna district administrators are not directly involved. Although it is appropriate that some regional planning decisions be taken at the highest political planning level - the provincial premiers and their officials - none the less the planning and implementation process should include all parties and authorities directly concerned. A further complication is that the PGO meets all decisions by unanimous consent. This implies that controversial issues are avoided or postponed indefinitely.

The particular problems of agglomeration areas, such as the Vienna region, require specific forms of joint action. Due to the structure of the PGO, cooperation between the city of Vienna and the two surrounding provinces, Lower Austria and Burgenland leaves much to be desired in regional planning as well as in joint regional development authorities. The particular problems in agglomeration areas require special forms of cooperation,

different from those required for national or European development issues. First attempts at broadened cooperation are visible, such as the Vienna Southern Transport Plan, or the planned locations for freight terminals. Rapid action is required to guarantee at least a continuous dialogue between all parties concerned during the planning and decision making processes.

## ***2.2 Lack of Joint Regional Action Proposals***

Cohesive, joint regional planning proposals and compulsory enforcement plans are missing in the Vienna region. Within the framework of the PGO (see 2.1), Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland have formulated targets on individual aspects of regional policy. However a complete, joint mutual regional planning policy binding for all three provinces has not emerged. There is no shared Vienna region economic, transit, housing or ecological policy. Coordinating mutual goals and concepts takes inappropriate amounts of time as the legislative bodies (provincial parliament and local councils) have no joint planning and decision making bodies. A further handicap is the minimal institutionalization (informal structure) of existing regional cooperation efforts.

## ***2.3 Enforcement Problems in Regional Policy and Planning***

Provincial regional planning laws and programs are frequently not implemented due to ambiguous regional planning decrees and lack of enforcement instruments. There is a lack of planning tools at local and inter-communal level. For example there is insufficient planning capacity in small communities, area balances are no longer up to date or are non-continuous, local development plans are not presented in time. Local autonomy limits joint planning. There are no shared instruments or policies for quickly reacting to specific mistakes in regional development, for instance to deal with suburban sprawl in the area around Vienna. The alignment of provincial housing subsidies (Wohnbauförderung) in accordance to the regional planning policy would be an important step.

## **2.4 Political factors**

The political factors further complicate joint policy between three provinces. The multi-million city of Vienna factually dominates the region. Vienna has a double role as both a province and a local council. Vienna's city politicians are also provincial officials. This gives them an extremely unequal negotiating position in contrast to other local councils. In contrast, Vienna's district authorities preside over a far greater population but have far less rights than a local mayor.

Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland have differing political majorities. These majorities differ once again at the local council level. This further complicates the flow of information and hinders the good will necessary for cooperative planning. Conflicting political interests hamper decisions at all levels. A consensus of opinion is very difficult. In light of these structures, long term regional cooperation can only be achieved by gradually introducing alternative decision making structures.



### **3 Suggestions for Strengthening Regional Cooperation**

Policy and planning are state responsibilities best performed by entities with a legal-organizational form similar to regional authorities or unions. Commercial, land and housing development can be achieved by private organizations such as funds, development societies or various public-private partnerships.

The wide variety of demands in regional coordination can only be solved by the combined efforts of many different institutions. A 'meta'-regional authority is not desirable. Nor would it be possible to obtain the political majority required for such an institution. Individual impulses and institutions are necessary at present. A final form need not be defined, however the content and time span of all new work should be geared to further strengthen cooperation in the Vienna region.

In light of international discussions and examples, cooperation proposals must contain following items:

- a) The establishment of effective institutions to guarantee long term regional policy and planning. These institutions must have the power and the means to instigate projects within their mandate. Projects that are geographically, topically, and time wise limited and as such solvable. These projects themselves should instigate yet further development (motor for the region).
- b) Progress must take place on several levels. The Vienna region forms one level, at the same time the larger area, (federal or European cooperation) should not be neglected. All levels should be able to merge with one another.
- c) All concerned parties must be included in the decision making process, in particular the provincial parliaments, the local authorities, and the Vienna district authorities and public interest groups.
- d) To facilitate information flow and decision making, members of the regional cooperation institutes should be chosen from the planning, legislative and

executive staff of the communities involved. This increases the efficiency and minimizes the time frame necessary in implementing policy.

- e) If a structure similar to a regional authority or regional parliament is established its members should not be elected. To avoid unnecessary political overhead and costs inherent in a direct election, members should be delegated or elected from existing local councils or provincial parliaments. The period in office should be limited to avoid quasi 'tenured' political delegates (encroaching bureaucracy by delegation). The staff of the cooperation institutes should be only partially civil servants, although the civil planning authorities must play a central role. An independent management is necessary to provide the necessary freedom of movement.
- f) There must be a clear division between planning and implementation agenda on the one hand and administrative or institutional activities on the other hand. Even separate institutions with different functions should have similar decision and information structures.
- g) A step by step implementation should lead from short term to long term regional cooperation.

Following suggestions are aimed at strengthening cooperation in the Vienna region. The provincial premiers must instigate and support the proposals. The decision to do so can be met in the PGO.

### ***3.1 A Permanent Regional Council at the PGO***

A permanent regional council should be created at the PGO. The council should consist of members of the provincial parliaments. All political parties should be represented. It should have observational and advisory status. There are no legal or authoritative barriers to creating a regional council.

The regional council should be supported by a group of independent experts. The three provincial planning officials should be permanent members of the council. In conjunction with the external experts they would provide advice and guidance to the

council. The planning officials should coordinate the content and propagate the opinions of the regional council amongst other planning officials and planning institutions.

The regional council should have the right to summon representatives of interest groups and external experts. The aims of the council are:

- a) to be a driving force in making regional coordination in planning a ` compulsory` topic for the three provincial parliaments. The inclusion of the legislative bodies is imperative for all further steps in organizing regional cooperation.
- b) to instigate research into existing joint regional institutions (form, authority, instruments, administrative structure, work area, goals, success). Of equal interest are current and future regional planning goals and work areas. This research should be the basis for planning future activities.
- c) to present within a fixed time period (1.5 years suggested), a concept to the provincial parliaments. The concept should include scope, organization, budget and implementation catalogue for `The Reorganization of Cooperative Planning in the Vienna Region`. The concept should treat questions such what type or form of Regional Congress, Regional Parliament or other joint institution. Which forms are acceptable for a multifunctional society, development society or regional society. The goal is to generate an concept and the necessary steps for implementing it.
- d) to inform local councils, interest groups and public institutions and participate in the councils research and results (items b and c). This can be attained via expert hearings with members of local councils, regional planners, administrators, developers and investors. Information should be collected on joint needs, perceived problems in cooperation, and joint desires. The council can and should publish its proposals for public scrutiny. The advantage of this approach is that the concerned have the opportunity to influence the decision making process.
- e) to inform the public of its activities. The forum for notifying the public should be the Regional Congress.

### **3.2 Temporary Regional Development Committees**

The Regional Council should be able to form temporary regional development committees. These committees should be formed for a specific topic (Semmering train tunnel), or a geographical area (Hainburg/Bratislava). The purpose of a temporary committee is to allow the direct participation of all affected parties in the information and decision making process. To exhaustively deal with all aspects of a topic. For example: the 'Southern Vienna and Its Adjacent Areas' committee would include the mayors of the adjacent towns, Vienna district authorities, investors and interest groups, to name a few. In addition to information exchange, the committees would play an important role in balancing conflicting interests in the predecision phase. The Regional Development Committees should brief the Regional Congress and oversee the implementation of joint planning decisions.

### **3.3 Creation of a Regional Congress**

A Regional Congress is proposed as a public forum for regional planning and development. It is a forum for publicly discussing regional planning and development. Regional Councils work should be presented. The Congress should stimulate debate on regional cooperation and interest a broad band of participants in the planning and development process. The goal should be to inform and advise the general public. The open discussion and resolution of conflicting interests builds the joint identity as the Vienna region. The Regional Council should use this forum to 'account' for itself in light of the public.

Annually or biannually a Congress should be convened. It should be an international showcase for policy in the Vienna region and a public debating forum. The topics for the Congress are selected by the Regional Council from all areas of regional planning and policy.

*Participants* should be: The parliamentary representatives of Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland; the Local and District representatives (mayor, district administrator, local councilors); legal interest groups (Chambers of Labor, Commerce, Provinces); private

interest groups and the political parties; representatives of business, development trusts, regional initiatives; (international) experts, planners, scientists; the public and the media.

*Primary Purpose* of the Regional Congress is to facilitate all forms of cooperative regional activity amongst the participants. The Congress responsibilities should encompass:

- a) agreement on mutual problem definition.
- b) the development of new problem solving competence
- c) the discussion and planning of regionally relevant projects with equal participation of all Congress members.
- d) increasing democracy in regional planning and policy debate (see point c)
- e) the promotion of a joint identity in the Vienna region
- f) the preparation and creation of regional networks and platforms
- g) joint use of planning potential and expertise
- h) achieving the ability to act jointly as a region

### **3.4 Creation of Joint Trusts, Development Agencies, and Projects**

Institutions across provincial boundaries are necessary, in the light of European competition, urban-development and transit policy problems to deal with specific agendas. For example:

- a) joint institutions to promote new business locations, land management or housing development.
- b) development societies to promote new urban centers to remove the strain on current agglomeration areas.

The Regional Council and the Regional Congress as part of their advisory function should develop proposals for activities.

At the local level joint projects should be promoted. Mutually beneficent inter-communal projects should blunt the negative effects of communal competition.

Public-private partnerships in clearly defined areas should serve as motors and experiments in joint development. The advantages of partnerships for limited projects are short implementation times, better publicity and shared responsibility. A disadvantage is

that systematic regional development can not be achieved and democratic control is relatively minimal.

### **3.5 Comprehensive Regional Information Management**

To make joint regional policy possible, regional information must be available. This must include land designation plans, accessible labor, available support and subsidies, transportation plans, regional infrastructure, relevant laws and ordinances, and so forth. The information must be rapidly and easily available to all political decision makers, planners and citizens. A regional information database must be created. It should be decentrally available to the general public.

## **4 Implementation**

The previously described proposals are intended for stepwise, incremental implementation. The desired effect is to be able to address specific problems immediately. At the same time, long term structural reform should be initiated, involving the concerned parties and the authorities responsible in the future. Without blocking urgent action we gain the time necessary to discuss, prepare and establish competent institutions for the Vienna region.

The outlined proposals are sufficiently open and flexible to allow for adaptation and augmentation. In the short term regional cooperation can be strengthened by:

- joint meetings of the regional planning committees of the three provinces.
- joint sessions of the provincial parliaments
- inter-regional expert teams within the PGO on specific tasks or projects, drawn from the concerned parties, the responsible authorities and entrepreneurs.
- existing EU-programs and regional subsidies provide additional incentives for implementing a variety of joint projects. Particularly in conjunction with the neighboring eastern countries.

The Regional Council at the **PlanungsGemeinschaft Ost** (PGO, see section 2.1) should be created. The members should be selected such that they have the authority to initiate and

support cooperative projects. It should determine the future form and content of cooperation in the Vienna Region. Its political responsibilities are high, at the same time it is the chance to obtain political consensus on necessary further strengthening of cooperation in the Vienna Region.

## 5 Conclusion

Joint planning and policy in the Vienna region (Vienna, Lower Austria and Burgenland) is indisputably necessary. Existing regional institutions (e.g. the Eastern Planning Council PGO, or the Eastern Transit Authority VOR) must be adapted to current problems. New regional institutions must be created. To deal with future European level planning and economic challenges, joint organizations and authorities must be created to work at a regional level. The main problems to be solved are

- a) the lack of joint policy and goals in regional planning, no obligatory planning policy.
- b) implementation deficits in regional planning and policy
- c) centralized regional planning
- d) underdeveloped City-Region cooperation and
- e) no cooperation in regional or local marketing and development

In light of these problems and international precedents in regional cooperation these proposals were developed to strengthen joint activity in the Vienna Region.

### ***5.1 Activities for Strengthening Regional Cooperation***

Clear impulses for intensifying and deepening regional cooperation are necessary. The final cooperation form need not yet be defined. To further develop cooperation in the Vienna region we propose the following:

#### **5.1.1 Permanent Regional Council at the Eastern Planning Authority (PGO)**

A first step would be the creation of a standing council at the PGO. The council should have observer and advisory status. It should be a preliminary test stage for a possible future regional parliament. The regional council should undertake to:



- a) make the issues of joint regional planning a ‘ compulsory’ topic in the provincial parliaments.
- b) consult on problems of regional planning, inter-communal cooperation, undertakings in sub-regions
- c) create a concept for the content, organization and financing of joint Vienna region planning
- d) instigate research into, the strengths and weaknesses of existing cooperative institutions and future needs in regional cooperation.
- e) inform the public about the councils activities and results.

### 5.1.2 Temporary Regional Development Committees at the Regional Council

Temporary regional development committees may be formed by the Regional Council. Their purpose is complete consideration of all aspects, interests and concerned parties in a particular regional planning or regional policy issue. A defining attribute of the Committees is the direct involvement of the affected parties in the information, consultation and decision making process ( local authorities, district authorities, investors, public and private interest groups). The committees should not only gather information, but also be a forum for discussing conflicting opinions and balancing interests in a pre-decision phase.

### 5.1.3 Comprehensive Regional Information Management

A regional information database must be created. It should be decentrally available to the general public. It should contain all information necessary to make cooperative regional planning decisions.

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<sup>i</sup> IUL-Satutes: International Union der Lebens und Genußmittelarbeitergewerkschaften