



## **Inter-Communal Cooperation in Spatial Planning in Austria. Political-Administrative Prerequisites since the 1990s**

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Austria is a country of rather small sized local authorities (ca. 2.300 municipalities on an area of ca. 84.000km<sup>2</sup>) and of a highly federal system of spatial planning. Within this system, the power of legislation lies solely with the competence of the nine federal states. On the national level - being without any normative power on spatial planning - non-binding governance structures and instruments have been established during the last decades with quite some success in order to better the situation of coordinated international cooperation, national cooperation between the sector policies of the republic (such as forestry or Environment), cooperation between the federal states and all local authorities, represented by two associations. This multilevel governance structure is embedded in the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (OeROK), founded in 1971.

Reflecting the complex multilevel structure of the Austrian system on spatial planning one would be in favor of interpreting the system as a firm one that is familiar with governance structures. Even this might be true in the overall sense; the history of cooperation between local and/or regional actors and authorities on smaller ties of the system is still a baby and about to be developed further. Since the 1990s, the federal states of Austria amended their laws on spatial planning and enlarged the set of planning instruments preferably with the aims of (1) a more consistent, long term planning and (2) formal options for inter-communal and interregional cooperation. This shift in the planning culture is also rooted in the adaption of EU Regional Policy - Austria became an EU member state in 1995.

In the paper and the presentation for the IPHS Conference 2010 the various ways how the federal States of Austria are implementing new planning concepts and the local authorities are assessing these instruments will be highlighted. A special focus will be given to the city regions and the cooperation possibilities of core cities and urban agglomerations with their neighboring municipalities and the wider hinterland. Inter-communal cooperation is facing a special challenge, when strong local authorities - like the municipality of Vienna, which is in the same time a federal state - and small authorities in terms of population and economics are being matched together in a regional governance structure. And once more the individual character of regional governance - depending on the concrete prerequisites in logistic, administrative and actor based scene - will be one result. Nevertheless, binding top down strategies - providing general rules of the game - for generating cooperation between local authorities can be of success.

**KEY WORDS:** Austria, governance, cooperation, local authorities, spatial planning.