

Temporary publicness created by networks – A perspective for the In-Between-City in rural districts

Univ. Ass. Dipl.-Ing. Sanja Zerlauth
sanja.zerlauth@tuwien.ac.at

Vienna University of Technology, Institute of Urban Design and Landscape Architecture,
Chair for Real Estate Development and Management
Gusshausstrasse 30 E260-P / A-1040 Vienna, Austria

Purpose:

The in-between-city is a phenomenon beyond the urban periphery. Even rural districts like Altenkirchen, situated in the famous Westerwald between the cities Bonn, Cologne, Mainz and Wiesbaden are torn between local and global economy, between living space and non-places of movement and between its small historical centers and the open countryside¹. The potentials and means to maintain and even create new local distinctiveness concerning culture and public life are to large extent unknown.

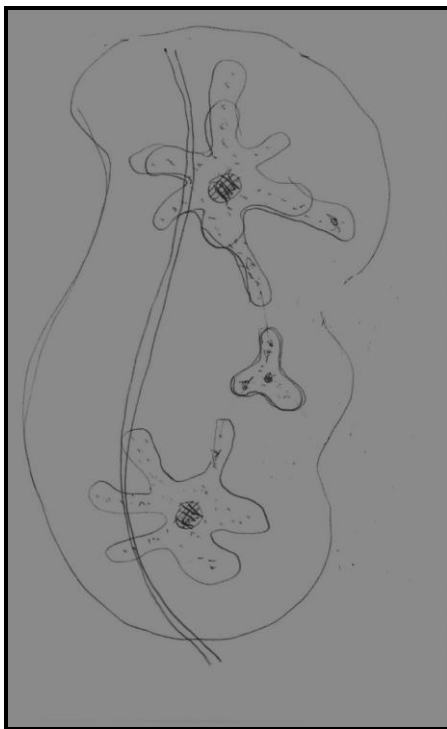


Figure 1² In-Between-City and its fragments

¹ Source: Cities without cities, an Interpretation of the Zwischenstadt, Forword to the English edition VII, Sieverts T., 2003

² Source: Chair of Real Estate Development and Management, TU Wien

Methodology/Approach:

Since 2007 Altenkirchen, an association of 42 municipalities with 24 thousand inhabitants, and other rural fragments of in-between-cities e.g. in Emsland and Vorarlberg have been surveyed by an international team of urban planners concerning the possibilities to maintain and develop cultural potentials and public life, that might create local identity and solidarity. Beside the collection of socio-economic data the methodology of semi-structured interviews with local stakeholders has been used. A culture-touristic network has been established in Altenkirchen and is now surveyed continuously.

Intermediate results of the research have been discussed and validated with experts on international conferences in Europe (UK; Rumania, Germany, Austria etc.).



Figure 2³ “Im Tal” (in the valley) – locations for art and events created by Erwin Wortelkamp

Findings:

(1) For one part of the local population the rural in-between-city fragment is still the core of their all-day life and their identity; for the other part it plays that role only part-time.

(2) Publicness in rural in-between-city fragments has to be produced by events and can easily be produced by events. Cases like Altenkirchen and Meppen showed already years before conscious interventions of urban planners an enormous number and variety of events – mainly culture and sports, but also focusing on or combined with education, trade and even religious or political topics.

(3) Events, mainly based on a common attitude of a certain group of the local population, create identity and divide the local population at the same time. Clusters of events organized by diverse urban players or even in a network of

³Source: Chair of Real Estate Development and Management, TU Wien, 2009

networks kept together by win-win situations and not by attitude contain the potential to create publicness in an urban sense, attract population from agglomerations and even create income and employment for the local population.

(4) Urban planners and the state seem to play a catalyst role concerning the start, the establishment and the development of these new types of event-networks – from risk management to the maintenance of a social integrative function.

(5) Research is needed concerning the methods to start, establish and guide 'cosmopolitan' event-networks – Porters theory of network business might be a good starting point.

Keywords: publicness, in-between-city, network model, economies of scale, identity of public space