

# Cultural-Touristic Network Altenkirchen – A perspective in development

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## Abstract

### *Purpose:*

Altenkirchen, as an association of 42 municipalities with 24 thousand and as the city with 7000 inhabitants, is situated in Westerwald/Raiffeisen region between the cities Bonn, Cologne, Mainz and Wiesbaden. It is a city torn between local and global economy, between living space and non-places of movement and between its small historical centers and the open countryside<sup>1</sup>. The chance which city has to present itself even only on the national market, without any visible highlights, neither in production economies, nor within its local tourist potentials, are relatively nominal. It is undisputed that cities are presently in national and international competition to increase economic power, produce creative milieus, protect soil and reduce socio economic differences to keep and attract young and well educated residents. In order to moderate that major disadvantages, a search of model oriented solution was initiated. The municipality of Altenkirchen approached us with the wish to create a concept for strengthening economical and cultural issues.

### *Methodology/Approach:*

Within the context of two studies, „Advancement of the Culture Economy and Tourism in the Raiffeisen Region“ and „ Advancement of Companies Engaged in the Culture Sector and Commerce in the Raiffeisen Region“, made with German partner “Verein für Kultur und Arbeit”, the potentials of the region have been surveyed in order to promote cultural touristic development.

The studies have shown the evidence of the huge number of local actors in cultural, touristic and commerce sectors. They all produce services and different events, but as single players. In that way each of them offers its different

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

products independently. Due to the fact, that the region stays invisible on a global market as touristic destination, it becomes obvious that single players cannot attract many visitors, neither emerges many economical effects.

Strengthened by the network theory, new idea, of how it would be possible to solve the set of problems in Altenkirchen has been evolved. As the conclusion of the both studies an alternative sustainable approach, a start-up of culture touristic network Altenkirchen *AKulTour.net* for promotion of the region, was initiated.

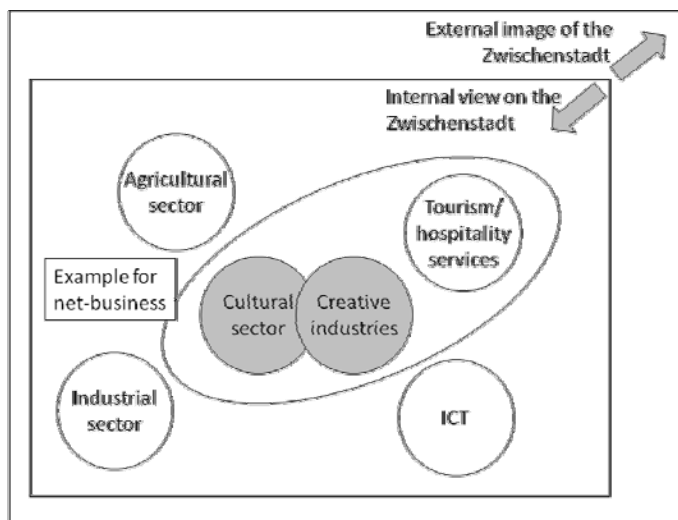


Figure 1<sup>2</sup>: Model of Culture Based Networks and their influence on the image and the development of the city regions

The network connects various local players, active in cultural, touristic and commercial sectors, allows new processes of exchange and value creation and strengthens the feeling of community.

According to the structures of the participating bodies in the network a Michael's<sup>3</sup> diagonal network type can be identified in case of Altenkirchen. He names them diagonal clusters and thinks of them as a network type which purchase an optimal outcome to the contrary of horizontal (e.g. hotel accommodations in ski resorts) and vertical clusters (e.g. car industry).

The main principles of these networks according to is the situation in which a) the complementary firms actually add value to each other while networking and b) different firms cooperate with other firms, for which they were not related in any way before. These both situations open new possibilities for cooperating parts, but the central thought is, that they can join their capacities together and

<sup>2</sup> Source: Chair of Real Estate Development and Management

<sup>3</sup> Ewen J. Michael "Micro-Cluster in Tourism", *Micro-Clusters and Networks: The Growth of tourism*, (2007)

commit themselves (through formal networks) in order “...to create a complete product, which the customer can purchase as a single item.”<sup>4</sup>

During both studies, the enormous potential of this approach was realized – that the Altenkirchen as model city could be understood and changed through relationships of exchange. As a result, this subject matter has become the basis of continuing research and the effort to better understand the mechanisms involved.

The AKulTour.net is now being surveyed continuously in order to achieve more facts about development and function of such networks.

#### *Findings:*

The evaluation of preliminary findings showed, that two important facts/preconditions emerge and if not solved/dealt with, appear as success critical factors.

- The bounding between the networkers need to be formal and such that obligatory participation is secured (There is a big difference between network, that just meets and exchanges ideas and the networks that exchanges and create products)
- They need an impulse from the policy bodies (Culture touristic networks do not emerge from all alone in densely built-up and inhabited region, because the density of the creative scene is also very low)

These preconditions do not affect the autonomy of each participant, because they can still be stand alone companies, but they have to find a way to oblige themselves to participate.

The goal of this paper is to show, that through the planned development of culture touristic business networks and the targeted linking of people engaged in the cultural and touristic sector as well as with other civic service providers (a) a new instrument and (b) an overall concept for the sustainable touristic development for the cities like Altenkirchen can be achieved.

There is still need for further research, especially when it comes to definition of the business deals within the network structures, as well as other organizational parameters like, coordination, initiation and financial support.

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

*Keywords:* cultural touristic network model, economies of scale, added value, sustainability of the local development

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<sup>4</sup> Ewen J. Michael “Micro-Cluster in Tourism”, *Micro-Clusters and Networks: The Growth of tourism*, (2007)

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## **Biography**

Sanja Zerlauth, Dipl. –Ing

Born on March, 15, 1982 in Bihać, Bosnia and Herzegovina, married.

Academic education:

2004/2008: Vienna University of Technology, Baccalaureate and Master in Architecture, Diploma of Architecture (Diplom Ingenieure)

2000-2004: University of Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Faculty of Architecture

Work Experience:

2008 - Present: Assistant Professor, Vienna University of Technology, Institute of Urban Design and Landscape Architecture, projects and research in topics:

- Project development of a culture center in Altenkirchen, Westerwald
- Scientific studies for the advancement of the culture economy and tourism in the Raiffeisen region
- Scientific accompaniment of the culture tourism network, AKulTour.net
- Dynamic simulation for the optimization of spaces and spatial planning for Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering, Vienna University of Technology
- Apprenticeship, Vienna University of Technology in subjects: “Theories, Methods and Processes of Project Development and Management”, “Urban and Regional Development Projects - Examples, theoretical approaches and experiences”, “Planners and Investors”.

2005 – 2007: Internship in architectural offices

2001-2003: Workshops on the University Sarajevo