

Services of public interests in peripheral regions in Lower Austria

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In contrast to the western regions of Austria (Vorarlberg, Tyrol and Salzburg) Lower Austria is rarely connected to the Alps. The "Schneeberg", the highest mountain in Lower Austria is only about 2.075 meters. About 6.000 square kilometres (= one third) of the total area of Lower Austria (19.100 square kilometres) belong to the alpine regions (according to the definition of the Alpine Convention). Nearly half a million inhabitants live in the 160 villages of the alpine region. In Lower Austria as a whole there live approximately 1.6 million inhabitants (in 573 municipalities).

Big parts of the alpine region in Lower Austria are situated in a great distance to the agglomerations. They can be characterized as peripheral. This fact also applies to other parts in Lower Austria (e.g. region "Waldviertel"). Connected to this periphery there are specific problems. So the population has decreased in the last years and it will be decreasing in the future as well. As a consequence of this population decline the services of public interests can only be maintained with big financial aid.

Considering the existing general framework spatial planning has an important role. First of all, the observation of spatial trends has a prominent role, because monitoring is the basis for political and professional decisions (spatial development policy, regional policy, departmental policy). Secondly, the instruments of spatial planning have to be mentioned. On the one hand binding instruments (e.g. central place theory), on the other hand non-binding instruments are gaining in importance. Among other activities rural and urban renewal can be mentioned at this point. As well as measures to strengthen the centres of the municipalities (= NAFES: Niederösterreichische Arbeitsgemeinschaft zur Stärkung des Einkaufs in Stadtzentren). At the same time spatial planning cannot response to all challenges in context with services of public interests. Spatial planning has to work together with other departmental policies. To "cooperate" is also an important approach for municipalities. Therefore the department of spatial planning and regional policy is supporting the villages and cities, when they cooperate.