

ISEK⁴ – A Regional Approach to Inner City Development

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1 ABSTRACT

Integrated planning approaches provide the toolkit for delivering holistic and interdisciplinary solutions to meet the complex challenges of the 21st century. However, established instruments such as the integrated urban development concept (ISEK, common in Germany) lack the multilevel spatial integration required to tackle these issues effectively. Designed as a pilot project for the development of a new planning instrument, ISEK⁴ addressed two spatial spheres that – despite obvious necessity – are rarely considered together in the existing planning toolkit: the inner city and the functional region. Within eight months, integrated urban development concepts for the inner cities of Bruneck (South Tyrol), Hermagor-Presegger See (Upper Carinthia), Lienz (East Tyrol), and Spittal an der Drau (Upper Carinthia) were developed along with a regional symbiosis of the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE, demonstrating and using synergies between the inner cities as anchor points of public life in the region. The ISEK⁴ project was based on a transdisciplinary planning approach and developed together with local steering groups from the cities. During the project, knowledge and needs were collected, recorded, and spatially contextualized in different workshop settings. In the work process, a mixed methods approach comprised of qualitative (GIS accessibility analyses, heat mapping) and qualitative (visioning, storytelling, document analysis, design thinking lab, etc.) planning and research methods was employed. The central outcome of the ISEK⁴ project was a joint regional vision of the future, in both which local potentials and characteristics as well as regional strategies for action are represented. Alongside a geographically warped future image of the region, a vision story was used to outline the key areas of joint action. The ISEK⁴ concept also contains four city-specific sections (local ISEKs) drawing upon the so-called regional guiding principles, which are combined in one joint document. The key innovation of the project was the simultaneous consideration of four municipal city centres within a regional framework. It was shown that through the symbiosis of multiple concepts, activities in the field of inner-city development can be bundled strategically and, in many cases, also implemented together. This paper focuses on the work process, the lessons learned and the transferability of the project approach, as well as selected results. A special focus will be on the methodological aspects of the storytelling method that was employed in the design of the regional and local future visions for ISEK⁴.

Keywords: Regional Symbiosis, Inner Cities, Urban Development, Alpine Space, Integrated Planning

2 INTRODUCTION

Integrated (inner) city development concepts (ISEKs¹) are a modern approach to sectorally and spatially integrated planning in cities. They are aimed at managing strategic investments with the intention of strengthening urban districts (usually central areas). So far, ISEKs have primarily been established in

¹ An ISEK outlines the scope of action as well as objectives, intervention fields and measures for a period of several years (cf. Heinig, 2022). The informal nature of the planning tool allows spatial and thematic priorities to be defined for specific locations. An ISEK identifies actions that can be implemented in the short term and at the same time provides a long-term view of the future. It takes into account the interactions of holistic and integrated development as well as the regional and city-wide spatial framework.

Germany, where they form a precondition for financial support from the federal government within the framework of urban development funding (“Städtebauförderung”). While the instrument is generally well suited to unlocking local or municipal development potentials, it rarely provides incentives for thinking and planning beyond the (geographical, and also thematic) horizon of the specific city. The experimental research project ISEK⁴, conducted by TU Wien in 2022, provides a possible approach for the evolution of the planning tool. ISEK⁴ – the second integrated inner city development concept to ever be developed in Austria following the ISEK Wolfsberg in 2021 – addresses the local needs for action in four different cities simultaneously and integrates them under a shared strategic umbrella.

3 STUDY AREA – THE SOUTH ALPINE SPACE

The ISEK⁴ project was realized within the spatial context of the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE, a highly dynamic cross-border region that spans two states – including one Italian and two Austrian provinces. Stretching from north-eastern part of South Tyrol (IT) via East Tyrol (AT) all the way to Upper Carinthia (AT), the region displays Alpine and Mediterranean influences at the same time. The four cities of Bruneck (IT), Lienz, Spittal an der Drau and Hermagor-Pressesegger See (AT) have been connected through an informal cities network since late 2019, when a charter outlining the principles and objectives of the regional cooperation activities was passed. The region has since continued to strengthen its cooperation efforts by issuing the Strategic Framework for the Development of the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE in which a mission statement was formulated and the systemic approach to the future collaboration was laid out (cf. Regionsmanagement Osttirol, 2021).

The SOUTH ALPINE SPACE region is spatially characterized by the interplay of the valleys and mountain ranges that surround the cities and smaller municipalities. Besides serving as import infrastructural corridors, the valleys also shape the cultural and natural landscape of the region. At the same time, the mountains form incisive spatial barriers between the settlement areas. The four cities involved in the ISEK⁴ project share the advantages of being situated along alpine rivers (Rienz, Isel, Drau, Gail) and having direct access to the railway network. These similar spatial circumstances create ideal conditions for mutual learning processes, as well as a common vision of inner city development.

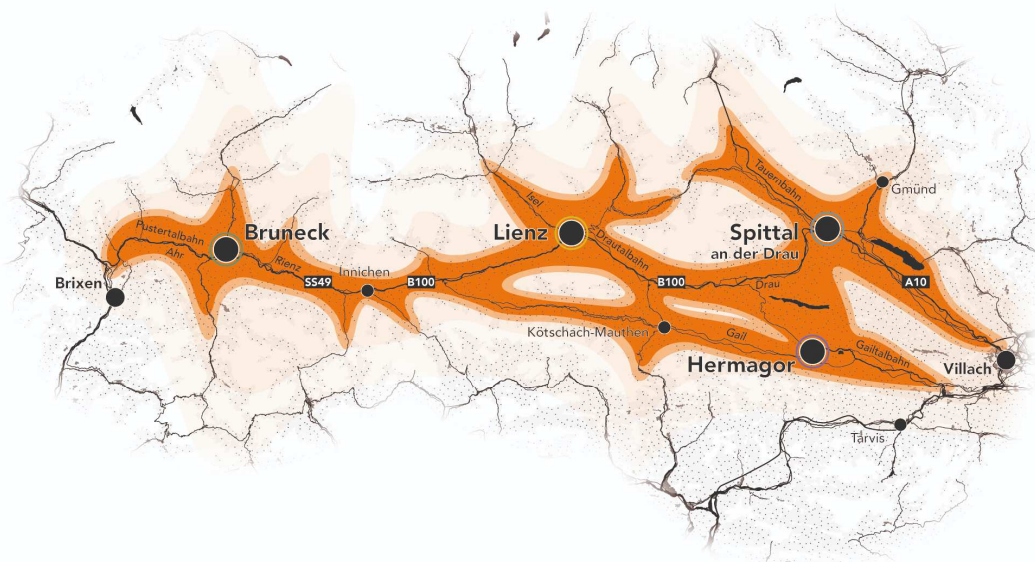


Fig. 1: Scheme of the region

Through regional railways, the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE is well-connected to the long-distance railway network. This includes major national and international connections, for instance from Lienz and Spittal an der Drau towards Vienna, Zürich or Zagreb. Through large infrastructural projects aimed at the expansion of Trans-European Networks (TEN-T, e.g. Brenner and Semmering base tunnels, Koralm Railway), the accessibility of the region will be further improved in the coming years (cf. Kunzmann, 2015). Well developed cycle routes along the region's rivers, sections of which are part of the EuroVelo network, also form an essential part of the mobility infrastructure. At present, these routes are already of great importance

for summer tourism. The establishment of new international connections (e.g. the Munich-Venice long-distance cycle route) is expected to lead to further growth in cycle tourism in the region (cf. Tscherne, n.d.).

Even though the region was originally defined along district and regional boundaries, the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE does not consider itself a mere aggregation of administratively isolated container spaces, but rather a functional space that is aware of its long-standing relationships with the surrounding regions out (cf. Regionsmanagement Osttirol, 2021, pp. 9-15). For instance, there are strong links with the neighboring Italian provinces of Belluno and Friuli as well as with the urban region of Bolzano and the central Carinthian metropolitan area (Klagenfurt, Villach). The interaction manifests itself, among other things, in the sharing of infrastructure, commuter relations and collaboration in the management of (alpine) natural hazards.

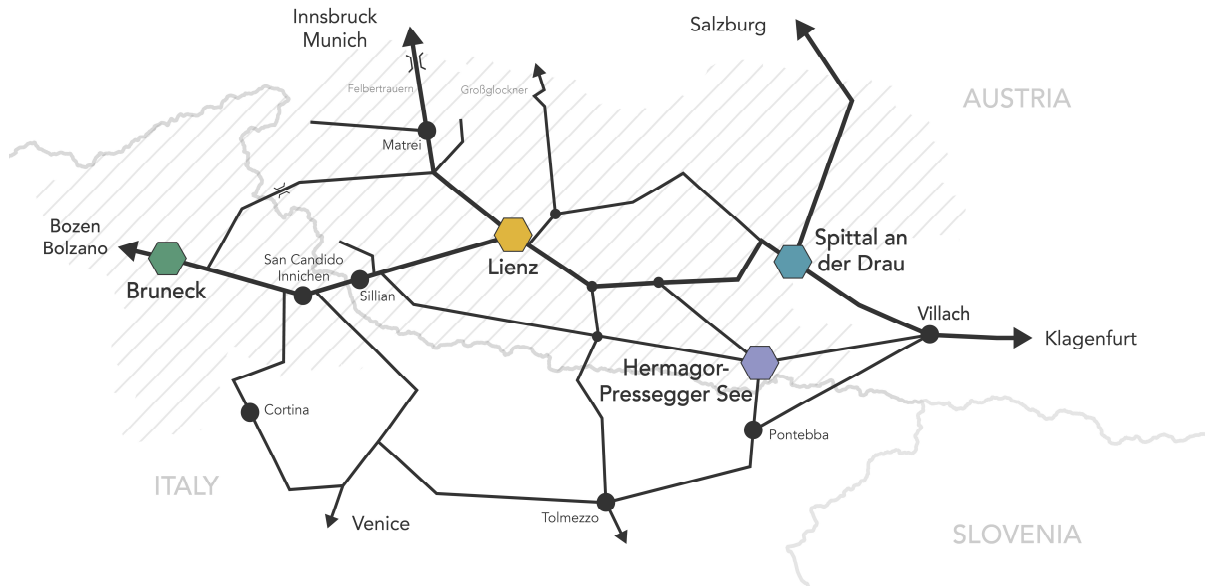


Fig. 2: The SOUTH ALPINE SPACE – connections and supra-regional links

4 THE ISEK⁴ PROJECT

The idea for ISEK⁴ came about at a time of intensive debates regarding the possible introduction of an urban development funding programme in Austria. The existence of an ISEK was discussed to be a precondition for funding eligibility. At this stage, the Austrian Conference on Spatial Planning (ÖROK) published ten expert recommendations dealing with the legal, administrative and instrumental framework conditions for strengthening city and town centers. Among other things, it proposed the elaboration of integrated urban development concepts (ISEKs). The document also contains very specific recommendations for the technical work involved in developing such concepts (cf. ÖROK, 2019). The SOUTH ALPINE SPACE cities network decided to tackle the task of inner city development together and to include the regional level.

Fact Box: ISEK ⁴	
Project Contractors	City of Bruneck, City of Hermagor-Presegger See, City of Lienz, City of Spittal an der Drau
Project Period	May 2022 – February 2023
Funding	INTERRFG (cross-border cooperation between Lienz and Bruneck) Austrian Federal Ministry of Climate Action (BMK) Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture (BML) Province of Carinthia (Land Kärnten)

Fig. 3: Project Fact Box

The ISEK⁴ project was funded from several sources. In addition to an INTERREG funding for cross-border cooperation between Bruneck (South Tyrol) and Lienz (East Tyrol), the Austrian Federal Ministries for Climate Protection (BMK) and Agriculture (BML) as well as the province of Carinthia also supported the project. The work process was completed within ten months and covered a period from May 2022 to February 2023 (cf. Hirschler et al. 2022).

The ISEK⁴ concept was developed in a collaborative planning process involving local steering groups from the four cities, each composed in a gender balanced way. The formation and size of these groups varied from city to city (between four and twelve people). The steering groups acted both as local development partners and as valuable information sources for the project team. There was a regular exchange between the steering groups and the TU Wien team throughout the project.

The first stage comprised a space- and actor-specific analysis, in which existing local concepts, plans, strategies and projects (ongoing or recently completed) from the four cities were screened in a secondary analysis. Possible development scenarios were discussed on the basis of a so-called opportunity-deficiency plan during participatory design workshops. The integrated assessment of the key issues from the analyses helped in defining objectives and developing local and regional future visions. These basic visions were refined in local strategy workshops and supplemented with specific strategies for action. At the subsequent project marketplace, workshop participants had the opportunity to present ideas for possible measures at a local or regional level within an open setting. Concurrently, the ideas and suggestions of the young local community were also collected at the young experts workshops.

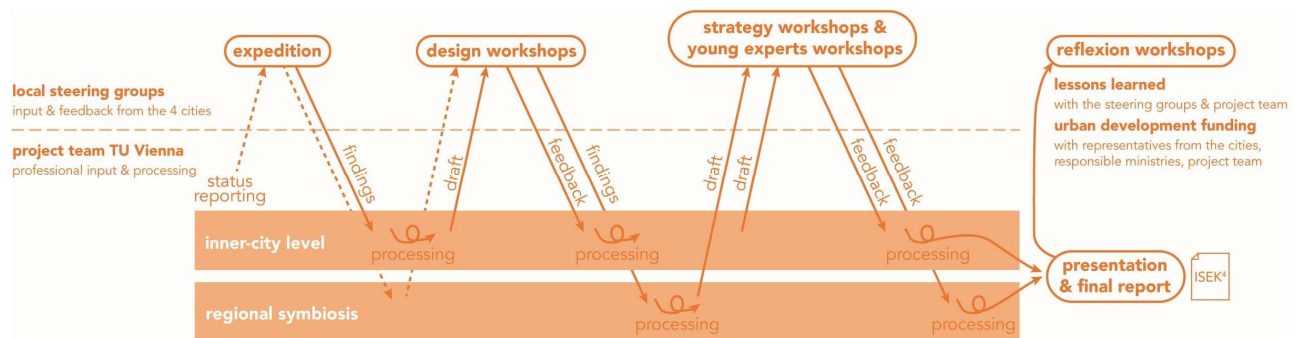


Fig. 4: Development process of the ISEK⁴

5 METHODS AND APPROACHES

At the outset of the project, the focus was initially placed on identifying the key factors for the city center development. Building on the screening of existing concepts, plans, strategies and projects described above, specific thematic primary analyses were added. For instance, GIS-supported network analyses provided insights on the accessibility of city centers by foot or bike. Using the storytelling method (cf. Sandercock 2003, Throgmorton 1992), the situation assessment was condensed into an experience report from the perspective of a person strolling through the city. Based on the initial analytical findings, so-called focus areas were outlined for which the need for short to medium-term action could be identified. Several excursions to the focal areas supported the spatial delimitation and provided the project team with new perspectives on the existing urban fabric. On the regional level, a multi-layer structural analysis was carried out to identify topographical, functional and infrastructural similarities between the cities. In conjunction with the findings from the local analyses, key regional themes (“regional guiding principles”) emerged that were accessed in all stages of the subsequent ISEK⁴ process.

During the participatory design workshops, the visioning method (cf. Salzmann 2013) was used in the development of future visions for the four inner cities and the SÜD ALPEN RAUM. The method makes use of various (audio-)visual techniques (e.g. photo collages, storytelling or mental maps) that make spatial development ideas more tangible for the people involved. With the aim of incorporating the regional level of action into the process, the workshop participants were also asked to reflect on the positioning of their city within the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE. Furthermore, (everyday) action areas in the region were located on a map (housing, work, education, shopping and leisure).

In the strategy workshops, which were held in all four cities in late September 2022, the graphical visions for the future of the inner cities and the region that had been prepared by the ISEK⁴ project team were enhanced

together with the workshop participants. The Design Thinking Lab method (cf. Lewrick, Link and Leifer 2020, pp. 17-27) was used to identify open questions and develop concrete strategies for action. In the subsequent project marketplace, the project canvas method was used (cf. *ibid.*, 309 f.) to create basic outlines for the implementation ideas (objectives, timeframe, funding, impact, stakeholders, users, etc.). The resulting project drafts were later condensed by the project team and structured according to their relation to the regional guiding principles. Finally, the project proposals were assigned to two categories - either local or regional.

Digital, hand-drawn visualizations have been used as a characteristic design form and permeate the entire ISEK⁴ concept. They spatially visualize abstract objectives and strategies using specific situations, symbolic representations and (in some cases) graphic exaggerations.

5.1 Application of the Storytelling Method

A key to the success of good spatial planning is being able to convey complex matters in an understandable and relatable way. Therefore, in a project like the ISEK⁴, which not only considers a variety of topics in an integrated manner, but also combines two different spatial levels, the use of the storytelling method is particularly suitable. The approach helps in forming the course of spatial changes based on existing situations and in preparing development paths in an understandable way for those affected by planning (cf. Schoberleitner, 2021).

The method was employed in various stages of the ISEK⁴ development process. Initially, experience-based stories written from the perspective of a pedestrian were used to convey the current status of the inner cities. These “situation assessments” not only point towards ongoing projects that were identified in the secondary document screening (e.g. the NOI Tech Park under construction in Bruneck) but also refer to findings from primary analyses (e.g. to the walking times extracted from GIS network calculations). Finally, they also include subjective impressions and experiences gained during the focus area visits, as well as aspects mentioned by on-site experts in the local workshops. The storytelling approach was also used in the presentation of the initial draft for the graphical future vision of the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE during the strategy workshops. At the start of the workshops, a short text was read out, picking up the contents of the regional vision image and translating them into specific everyday situations experienced by the region's inhabitants of the future. Despite initial slight confusion, the workshop participants quickly picked up on specific aspects of the future story to communicate their suggestions for the graphical future visions. This way, storytelling helped to initiate a lively (yet constructive) discussion between the local experts and the project team.

Lastly, storytelling passages became vital building blocks of the final ISEK⁴ concept report. In conjunction with drawn digital images, stories were used to convey the local and regional future visions from the perspective of an architect named Anna. Through real-live situations, objectives and recommendations of the ISEK⁴ concept are presented in a tangible way.

6 RESULTS

The need for intensified regional cooperation is reflected in the concept and structure of the ISEK⁴ final report (Fig. 5). The underlying aim is to consider regional framework conditions, potentials and objectives in combination with local activities (cf. Hirschler et al. 2023, 23 f.). The decision to combine all four local ISEKs as well as the regional symbiosis into one overall document is intended to accommodate the spatial integration of the concept.

6.1 General Planning Framework

In order to facilitate a holistic approach to the future development of the four inner cities and the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE region, a general planning framework was developed first – a set of criteria that is supposed to form the basis for all activities, regardless of the spatial situation (city center, overall city or functional region). These fundamental planning values were developed in a co-productive approach to ensure an inclusive, resilient and adaptable development. The framework comprises the following six aspects:

- Strengthening of cities and regions of short distances
- Land conservation and reuse of existing facilities

- Making and keeping cities resilient to climate change
- Ensuring equal opportunities for everyone
- Learning from each other and growing together
- Establishing a resilient SOUTH ALPINE SPACE

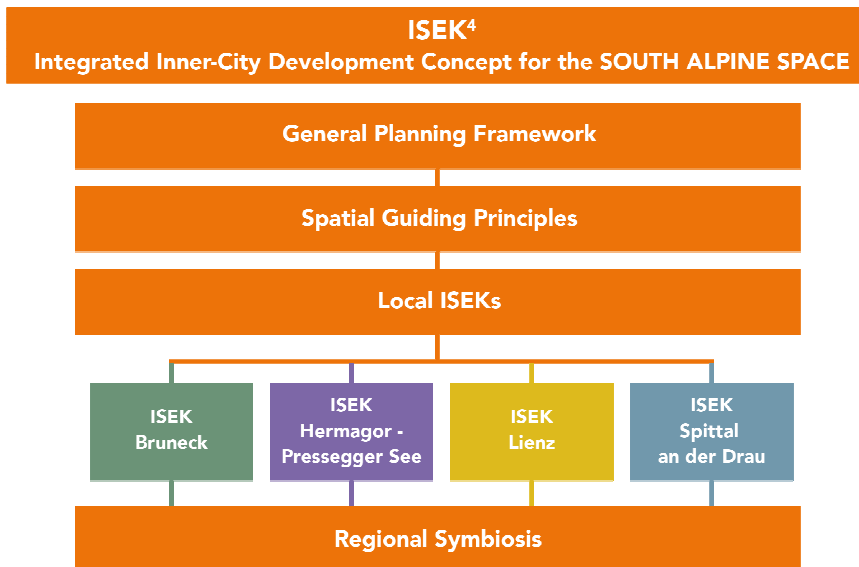


Fig. 5: Structure of the ISEK⁴

6.2 Spatial Guiding Principles

Based on this general planning framework, seven regionally specific spatial guiding principles were identified. They reflect common issues, challenges and opportunities identified in all four cities during the analysis stage. The spatial guiding principles link the general planning framework to the spatial development goals at the inner-city as well as the regional level. The spatial guiding principles link the general planning framework to the spatial development goals at the inner-city as well as the regional level. They can be found throughout the ISEK⁴, from the local visions of the future, the concepts and development ideas all the way to the regional symbiosis.

6.2.1 Riverbanks and Free Spaces – Perceptible and Nature-Oriented

A common characteristic of the four cities in the SÜDALPENRAUM is their location along one or multiple rivers, allowing for the achievement of high urban development qualities in the city centers. In times of advancing climate crisis, watercourses take over important cooling functions in the urban fabric and act as a natural air conditioning system. If riverbanks are designed in a nature-oriented way, rivers can also function as important biodiversity corridors within Alpine areas. ISEK⁴ therefore sets out the goal of removing visual barriers and improving the accessibility of inner-city watercourses (taking into account natural hazard protection). By creating connections to the pedestrian and cycle path network, the riverbanks will become anchor points within a dense network of green and open spaces in the inner cities.

6.2.2 Mobility Transition – Lived and Liveable

In terms of mobility, the focus needs to be significantly shifted towards walking and cycling in the foreseeable future. Given their size, the cities of the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE lend themselves ideally as cities of short distances. Virtually all important facilities and amenities can be reached within 15 minutes by foot, by bike or via supplementary mobility services (city buses, shuttles, sharing services, etc.). The reduction of transport-related CO₂ emissions can only be achieved through a densification of public transport services, attractive supra-regional cycle paths between the centres and the promotion of active mobility in the cities.

6.2.3 Railway Station Districts – Integrated and Activating

In this context, railway stations and their integration into the urban fabric are also becoming increasingly important. Acting as mobility hubs, they connect (supra-)regional to local transport networks. At the same

time, a broad spectrum of uses is clustered at railway stations: Local amenities, gastronomy, meeting places, logistics, sharing services, etc. This concentration of functions offers enormous potential when it comes to reducing journeys and distances in everyday life. At the same time, a revitalisation of the surrounding urban areas can be achieved. In the future, the station districts will serve as a link between regional and international mobility axes on the one hand and city centres on the other.

6.2.4 Tourism – The City Centre as an Attraction

The touristic potential of the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE needs to be more effectively linked with inner-city attractions in the future. A focus should be put on creating attractive public transport services towards popular tourist destinations (e.g. skiing or hiking areas). Conversely, existing and planned tourist cycle routes should be integrated into the city centre mobility network in the best possible way. Moreover, a joint tourism brand identity focussing on sustainable and healthy tourism could be established. This would not only increase the number of overnight stays, but also lead to an improvement of the cooperation culture within the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE.

6.2.5 Building and Planning Culture – Reuse and Renew

A state-of-the-art building and planning culture must focus on the existing building stock. Considering the advancing climate crisis, it is crucial not to waste the grey energy stored in established structures. Existing buildings in many cases offer important qualities that only need to be restored or adapted in order to meet changing functional requirements. Therefore, ISEK⁴ sets the objective of securing, modernising and redensifying existing developments wherever possible. An active planning culture (architectural competitions, participatory and dialogue-based processes and citizen participation) offers the opportunity to develop tailor-made and location-specific solutions.

6.2.6 Planning for all Generations – Attractive and Inclusive

A holistic planning approach for the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE should aim to create attractive living conditions for local people - regardless of their age or circumstances. ISEK⁴ aims to achieve this objective through affordable housing for young families, students and pensioners that is tailored to local needs. Furthermore, childcare facilities should be improved, and the range of available leisure activities expanded. Thanks to the barrier-free design of public spaces, city centres will become easier to experience and enjoy for those with disabilities.

6.2.7 Regional Resources – Use and Expand

The interaction of complex global challenges (climate crisis, energy crisis, scarce municipal budgets, etc.) also has a noticeable impact at regional and local levels. The SOUTH ALPINE SPACE region has set itself the goal of focussing on regional or local strengths and potentials. A broad selection of high-quality regional products will help to increase the reliability of supply and the resilience in times of crisis. By expanding renewable energy production, the cities of the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE want to make a contribution to the efforts against the climate crisis. Tackling these challenges together as a region and agreeing on important core issues helps to relieve strained municipal budgets.

6.3 City-specific chapters of the ISEK⁴

The concept contains four local chapters for the four cities, which are then consolidated in the regional symbiosis to form an overarching joint development strategy in line with the holistic vision for the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE. The local ISEKs each include a situational assessment formulated as a personal experience report as well as an overview of current developments, existing concepts, and plans. The vision for the city centre in 2040 is presented graphically and through a future story from the perspective of a protagonist named Anna. Specific intervention plans have been developed for the so-called "focus areas", in which a significant need for action has been identified (short to medium term). In addition, one so-called "perspective space" has been defined per city, a space that could be included in longer-term urban planning considerations.

Although all local ISEKs are aligned with common regional guiding principles, some strategic distinctions can be made. The Bruneck (South Tyrol) ISEK, for instance, places a particular focus on the integration of green and open space networks into the city centre and, more specifically, on increasing the attractiveness of

the Rienz riverside surroundings. In Lienz (East Tyrol), strategic considerations focussed on opening up the attractive and well-frequented old town towards its surroundings while activating the "inner peripheries" around the centre. In the Carinthian city of Spittal an der Drau, which currently suffers from heavy traffic congestion along a major provincial road, the emphasis was on redesigning the city centre to promote active mobility. Finally, the local ISEK for Hermagor (also Carinthia) prioritises the reactivation and transformation of existing structures (e.g. an old backpack factory or a residential estate from the 1940s). The integration of these four individual local development strategies under a common regional umbrella has triggered interesting new dynamics and debates after the completion of the ISEK⁴ project. For instance, the newly constructed mobility centre in Lienz, which was frequently cited throughout the ISEK⁴ process as a best-practice example for linking active mobility with public transport services, has sparked discussions in other cities about redesigning station forecourts in a similar way.

6.4 Vision and regional symbiosis for the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE

Based on the results of the local workshops, a joint regional vision of the SOUTH ALPINE AREA was developed in collaboration with the local steering groups (Fig. 6). The illustration contrasts the physical spatial conditions by bringing the region's four city centres closer together graphically. This results in a region of short distances, in which the four cities are not only connected through collective activities, but also through (a rather fictional) spatial proximity. Local characteristics and individual potentials of the cities become just as visible as regional project proposals (e.g., a regional data cloud, the linking of tourism with public transport services or the expansion of supra-regional cycle routes).

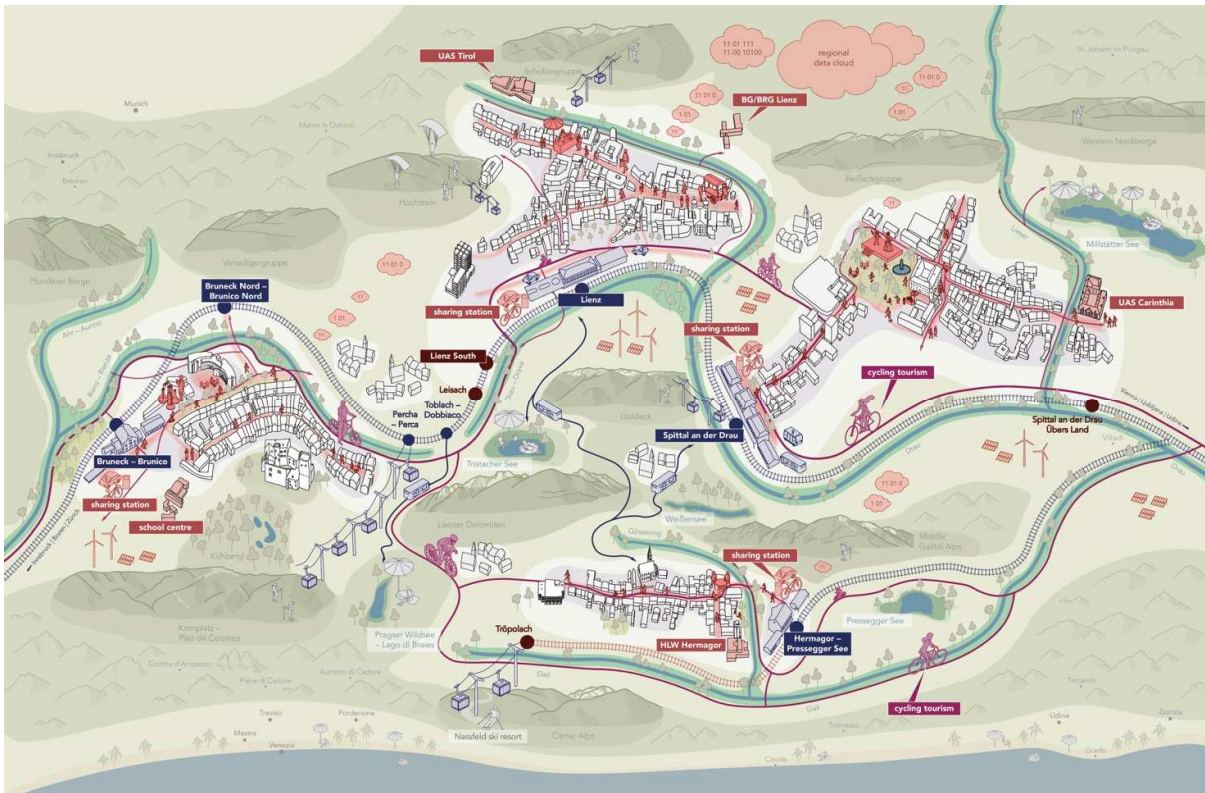


Fig. 6: Regional Vision

To accompany the graphical vision, a future story was developed using the storytelling method. The story, also written from the perspective of protagonist Anna, describes the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE as a well-connected, future-orientated, innovative, and inclusive activity space. Excerpts from the future story (translated from the German original) are presented in the following:

It's a warm summer morning in 2040 and we meet up with architect Anna in a café near the mobility centre at Lienz train station. She is originally from East Tyrol and has studied at the FH Kärnten in Spittal an der Drau. After working in an architectural office in Milan for a few years, she returned to her native region just recently. Anna orders a cappuccino and tells us all about what has changed since she left for Milan: The SOUTH ALPINE SPACE has evolved to become an attractive, sustainable and inclusive region. The region

takes particular pride in the fact that it has already been awarded the European Climate Label for Regions twice. One reason for this is that the railway has become the most important lifeline in the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE. Thanks to more frequent services and an improved mobility infrastructure, railway transport has almost completely replaced the private car. Today, the four inner cities are the driving forces of the region and represent key anchor points for regional co-operation. Anna takes the last sip of her coffee and invites us to accompany her for a day through the region. [...]

Anna goes on to outline her everyday working life as a sought-after architect and takes the readers along on her train journey to her first job in Tröpolach near Hermagor.

[...] We arrive at the construction site, Tröpolach station, around noon and are cheerfully greeted by supervisor Sofia. “Ciao Anna”, her voice can be heard reverberating across the entire platform. Anna returns the greeting and chats in fluent Italian with Sofia, who grew up in a small town near Cortina. The supervisor tells her that the new solar panels for the platform roofs have just been delivered. As soon as the modules have been installed, the station will be able to cover part of the electricity needs of the mountain railway to the Nassfeld mountain. [...]

After finishing her tour of the construction site, Anna takes us back to Lienz, where the regional project marketplace will take place in the afternoon. In Lienz, the architect proudly shows the visitors the new “Ackerbox” at the railway station, a place where you can buy fresh products from around the region. The group proceed to the regional project marketplace by bike.

[...] Before the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE conference, Anna’s friend Julia, an IT technician, presents her idea of an international, multilingual regional kindergarten offering full-time childcare. As a potential location, she suggests a vacant building near the NOI Techpark in Bruneck, right next to the central biodiversity park. Julia is obviously proud of how well the town has managed to combine local recreation with its focus on technology in recent years. She hopes that the public park will also be used as an open space for the new kindergarten – in her opinion, this would be the perfect way to combine playing with learning about biodiversity. The nearby Rienz river could also offer cooling on hot days. [...]

Upon receiving a spontaneous call from her friend Daniel, Anna decides to spend the evening at an open air theatre event in Spittal an der Drau.

[...] We finally reach the city park. There’s a lot going on here today – it feels like everyone in the SOUTH ALPINE SPACE has come to visit Spittal an der Drau. The open-air theatre performance turns out to be a great success and the sweltering heat under the palm trees in the city park has subsided a little. As we walk back to the railway station, we study the little flyer we were given in the city park on the way. The wealth of cultural events on offer in Spittal an der Drau is truly impressive. The train back to Lienz is well filled despite the late hour - apparently we weren't the only ones visiting from East Tyrol. This time around, we don't hop off at Lienz main station, but continue one stop further to the station near the “Südtiroler Siedlung”, where Anna lives. She proudly tells us that she was involved in the redevelopment of the estate. The valuable historical building structures were renovated in the 2030s along with some densification work. Similar historic neighbourhoods in the other three cities were also remodelled based on the Lienz example. Thanks to the new station, the Südtiroler Siedlung has become one of the most popular residential areas in Lienz. At around 11 p.m., we say farewell to Anna at her front door. She is tired, but already looking forward to the next day. [...]

Beyond the regional vision, the regional symbiosis integrates the individual strengths of each city and the respective development approaches identified in the ISEK⁴ process. The local and regional project ideas drafted during the local workshops were interlinked across the seven spatial guiding principles. This resulted in a project overview that reflects the most suitable scope for action in each case (individual city, bilateral or trilateral co-operation or the region as a whole) and also shows possible synergy effects between the ideas. The regional symbiosis therefore demonstrates how the key spatial ideas could be realised in practice in the region.

7 CONCLUSION

Previous ISEKs in Germany and Austria have focussed exclusively on individual cities, specific districts or other spatially coherent urban structures. The key innovation of the ISEK⁴ project is the simultaneous consideration of multiple city centres within a regional framework. Through the symbiosis of four concepts,

activities in the field of inner city development can be bundled synergetically and, in many cases, also implemented collaboratively. In line with the regional vision, in which the four city centres have clearly "moved closer together", joint projects could provide the momentum for a further deepening of the regional cooperation culture.

At the start of the work process, a conscious decision was made not to include the neighbouring municipalities in the concept - partly due to the time constraints of the project. In terms of an integrative planning approach, it would make sense to also include the needs and perspectives of the neighbouring municipalities in similar projects in the future. The question of what effects ISEK⁴ can be expected to have on the other communities in the region remains unanswered, but would be extremely interesting from a professional point of view.

The composition of the local steering groups varied from city to city and ranged from a purely political line-up to a mixture of representatives from civil society and politics. A precise recommendation on the optimal composition and size of the steering groups cannot be derived from the ISEK⁴ project team's experiences. Instead, the respective local planning and participation culture should be taken into account when forming the groups.

ISEK⁴ is not an implementation strategy and therefore does not contain any detailed or ready-to-implement projects. Instead, it contains sketches of initial ideas that could support the cities and the region in implementing the inner city development concept. The responsibility for detailed planning, political coordination and the implementation of specific measures now lies with the cities.

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