

**gLOCALize.IT!**  
**Using information technologies to strengthen  
local knowledge and tradition in a globalized world**  
**The example of "Austrian Iron-Route"**

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**Short Lead**

The "Austrian Iron-Route" as an example how to strengthen local and regional characteristics in a globalized surrounding using innovation and technology

**1 ABSTRACT**

Globalization meanwhile influences the development of every region. An interesting task for planners is to find ways for cities and regions to use the advantages of globalization but avoid the disadvantages, to integrate regions and its people into "global community" and at the same time strengthen the specific regional specifics like culture and tradition.

The region of the "Austrian Iron-Route" establishes a regional web-portal and a regional knowledge database to strengthen its competitiveness and make the region more attractive as well for people living there as for tourists. Local and global developments are not seen as contradictions but have to be combined for an optimal positioning of a region - regional innovation and information & communication technologies are important tools for successful example of gLOCALize.IT!

**2 GLOBALIZATION: THE END OR THE RENAISSANCE  
FOR LOCAL KNOWLEDGE AND TRADITION?**

The same goods in the same supermarket shelves from the North Cape to Fireland, the "business districts" of cities around the globe are like two peas in a pod and the price for the global product "hamburger" provides information about the economic resources of a country.

Do the meanings of local and regional characteristics completely disappear? Are they reduced to a few marketable folkloristic aspects? Or does the local and regional level even gain significance in the view of global and international developments? Is the slogan "think global, act local!" antiquated or more important than ever?

Is there a way for cities and regions to get the benefits of globalization and avoid the disadvantages that it might also bring?

Can information and communication technologies (ICT) be the key for sustainable urban and regional development?

Let us have a look at the "Austrian Iron Route", a region with a long industrial history, nowadays a rather remote area.



Fig. 1: gLOCALize.IT!

### 3 THE EXAMPLE OF THE “AUSTRIAN IRON ROUTE”

The region of the "Austrian Iron Route" establishes a regional web-portal and a regional knowledge database to strengthen its competitiveness and make the region more attractive as well for people living there as for tourists. What is the motivation for this step?

The ‚Österreichische Eisenstraße‘ (the ‘Austrian Iron Route’) names a region that stretches over parts of 3 of Austria’s provinces, Lower Austria, Upper Austria and Styria. Starting from the Erzberg mountain, where ore was extracted in opencast mining from early days on, the iron business spread over that whole region and reached its heights in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Then 25% of the whole European raw material market was covered by this production. The history of the local iron industry with all its diversification kept influencing the whole region over the centuries till nowadays. People’s culture and manmade landscape were formed with the wealth and the social and political privileges of the times of the heights of local iron industry. This specific regional culture is not only visible in dead testimonies of a great past, but is actually lived in modern form rooting in the traditions.



Fig. 2: Location of Austrian Iron Route

Due to the fact of being located in a geographically extreme and more aside provincial government’s political and economical centers migration is a serious topic for the region.

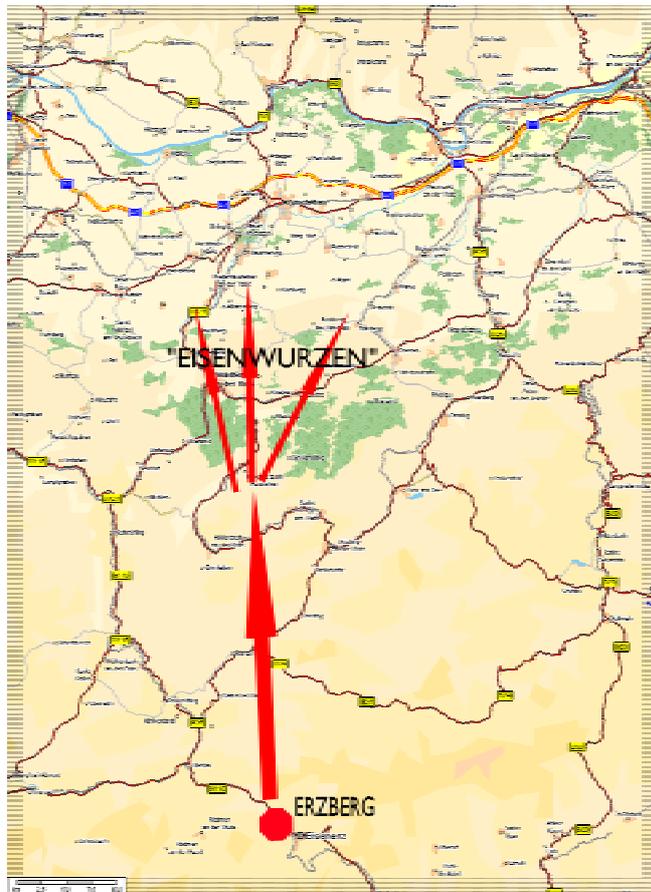


Fig. 3: „Eisenwurzen“ – the tree and its roots

Decreasing population numbers in the communes near the provincial borders and the accompanying regression of necessary infrastructure raise the need for a strong counter initiative. So as in the south of the region tourism has become a dominant factor for the local industry.

The cultural project ‘Dokumentation Eisenstraße’ (‘Documentation of the Austrian Iron Route’) was launched as a strong initiative for strengthening the local cultural identity. The evaluation of the local cultural heritage strengthens local identity through knowledge of own history and its cultural testimonies.

Still on the basis of preservation and further development of the cultural potential and consciousness further value adding measures are started. Tourism and leisure time industry, as the new economical motor of the south of the region is able to fall back on a sound base of real traditional, historical contents. All this under the aim of improving local quality of living.

### 3.1 The Regional Knowledge Database

Documented regional knowledge from different areas and sources such as museum objects, literature of libraries, archive material, contents of history, local culture and natural history, are collected in one online database for providing the possibility of interdisciplinary and interlinked retrieval of certain topics and aspects.

The whole process of a structured gathering of data, its processing, completion and activation of this regional knowledge yields a stronger individual identification with the own local roots: The completion and activation of those contents takes place in strong interaction with local people and institutions. The worldwide availability of this knowledgebase over the internet as a possibility for both access and personal contribution, the communication of the local identity beyond the borders of regional physical reality into a worldwide virtual space are seen as a further attraction to all those living outside the region. So advances in communication technologies are used to gain a wider broadcast of regional contents.

In order to address a wide range of people the knowledge can be retrieved in different levels of detail.

Still the virtual database can only be as good as the data-filling human network behind. This real network is documented within the database, as well. Members of that network, as experts on their certain fields, provide their support in reality as for talks and guided tours as well as online via email.

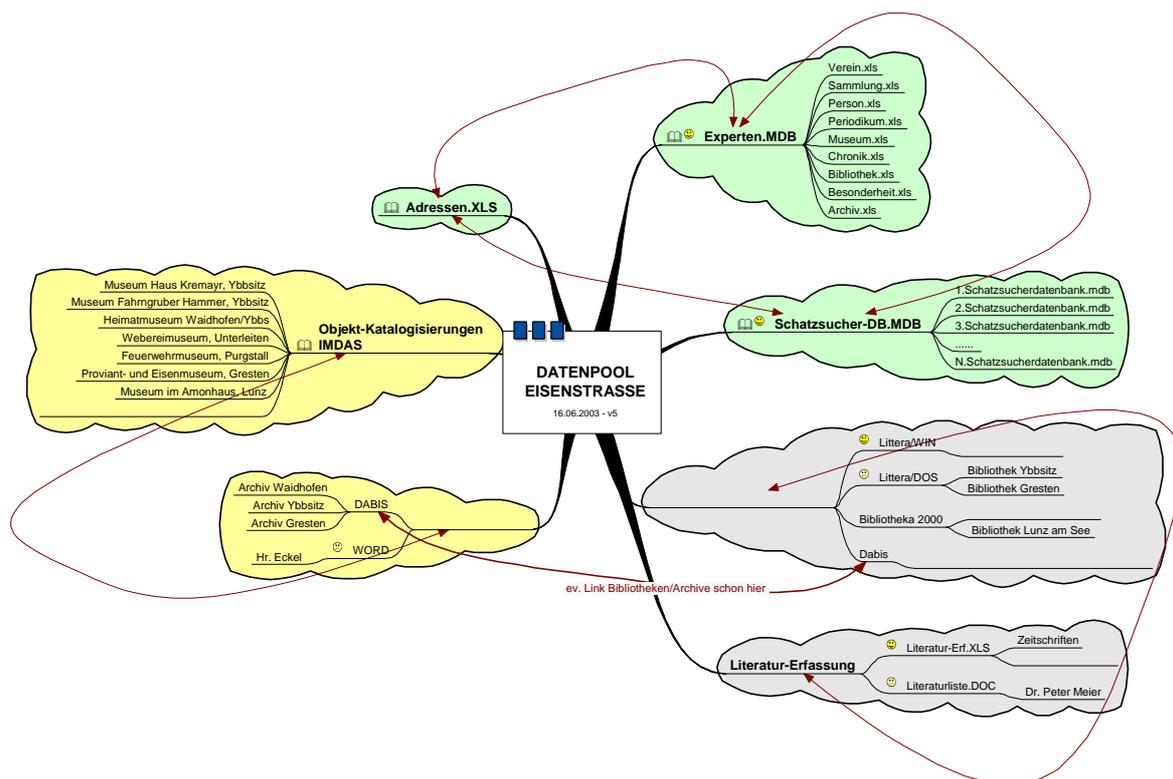


Fig. 4:: Input Data for "Regional Knowledge Database"

### 3.2 Regional Web-Portal

The database is available over an internet site, that also acts as a basis for the communication between the members of the expert network. The site also gives access to a public communication platform. So the regional capacity and potential of expert knowledge is activated and also, through its worldwide availability, is free for contact and discussion with an interregional pool of experts and institutions.

Still not only specialist knowledge from the online database and further expert support can be found at the internet site, but also touristic information, a virtual travel through the region's beautiful countryside, a web shop, etc. provide the visitor with an variety of contents for their specific interests.

Besides this virtual 'information desk' special service centers, the 'DokuZs' ('Documentation Centers'), act as the local link to personal information.

### 3.3 The way ahead: Visions for Austrian Iron Route

The goal is to create a competent network that is active out of its own recourses. This local and regional activity has its counterpart in a worldwide virtual image.

In a first stage the concept is implemented for the part of Lower Austria. A constant enlargement of the database as well as the implementation for the whole region will follow.

Innovation and future oriented development are based on the consciousness of regional cultural identity. Through its structured and activating work the 'Dokumentation Eisenstraße' shows a very interesting approach.

## 4 THE 3<sup>RD</sup> COMMUNICATION REVOLUTION

### 4.1 The 3 communication revolutions

There have been 2 "communication revolutions" so far in the history of mankind:

- Writing, that marks the borderline between "pre-history" and "history"
- Gutenbergs invention of the printing press that made "mass communication" possible

From the authors point of view we are just within the 3<sup>rd</sup> communication-revolution, the "Digital Revolution" that will have massive impacts on spatial development.

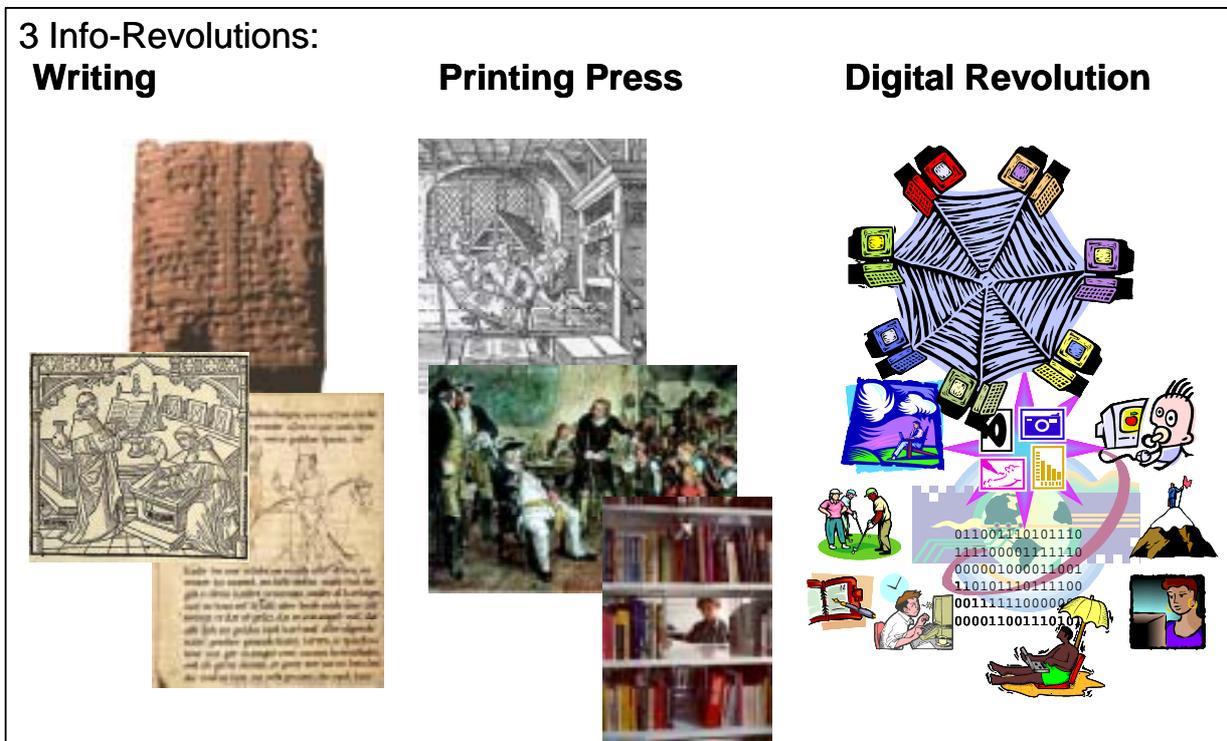


Fig. 5:: The 3 communication-revolutions

Fig. 6 shows the development of communication in terms of sender-receiver-relationship, differentiated in number of senders/receivers, place, time and direction. As shown computer

networks (like the internet) allow each mode of technical communication that was possible so far, often even with enormous improvements in the “traditional” media-use.

Modes and technical development of communication							
Mode of communication	Sender-receiver –Relationship					Modes of expression for senders	Responding senses of receivers
	Number of Senders	receiversr	Place	Time	direction		
 <b>Personal talk, contact</b>	1	1	Ident	synchron	 interactive	All	all
 <b>Lecture, concert</b>	1 (few)	few	Ident	synchron	 S -> R		
 <b>discussion</b>	few	few	Ident	synchron	 interactive		
 <b>Wall-painting, poster</b>	1	few	Ident	asynchron	 S -> R	Written word, picture	visual
 <b>Letter, fax)</b>	1	1	different	asynchron	 S -> R		
 <b>book, newspaper, magazine</b>	1 (few)	many	Different	asynchron	 S -> R		
 <b>Grammophon , record, CD</b>	1 (few)	many	Different	asynchron	 S -> R	Spoken word, music, sounds	Acoustic
 <b>Telephone</b>	1	1	Different	synchron	 interactive		
 <b>Radio</b>	1 (few)	many	Different	synchron / asynchron	 S -> R		
 <b>Cinema, video, ...</b>	1 (few)	many	Different	asynchron	 S -> R	Moving pictures, music, spoken word	Visual & acoustic
 <b>TV</b>	1 (few)	many	Different	synchron / asynchron	 S -> R		
 <b>CD-ROM, DVD</b>	1 (few)	many	Different	Asynchron	 S -> R	Texte, (bewegte) Bilder, Töne;	Visual & acoustic
 <b>Computer-networks,, INTERNET</b>	1, few, many ...	1, few, many ...	Ident or different	synchron / asynchron	 S -> R & interactive	Texte, (bewegte) Bilder, Töne;	Visual & acoustic
<b>Integrates all technical modes of communication developed so far and pushes them further; still in rapid development!</b>							
 <b>Mobile communication of the (near) future</b>					Each sender-receiver-constellation is possible		
					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• independent from place</li> <li>• everytime</li> <li>• multi-media-enriched</li> </ul>		

Fig. 6: Modes and technical development of communication

The most important step as the authors see it is the overcoming of “one-way-communication”, as everyone can be not only a receiver of information but also a sender –

and what is true for persons is also true for regions: not only the big cities can offer information over the net but also rather remote regions and even small villages.

#### **4.2 Overcoming One-Way- Communication**

Teenagers around the world dream of Hollywood Boulevard and the beaches of California (or of similar setting produced by similar “dream factories” – not because everyone has been there but because the “dreams” are delivered by mass communication, nowadays mainly by film and TV.

As mentioned the big difference of Internet compared to TV: it’s an interactive medium, where every user can be as well consumer as producer of information, and that can be a big chance for active regions, independent of their size.

#### **4.3 Reversing Brain Drain - Bringing back knowledge to the regions**

One vision is to “reverse the brain drain”, to bring the local knowledge and ideas of the most innovative people back to the region of origin. As mentioned like many other regions also the “Eisenstraße” faces the problem of decreasing population, as people move to the big cities.

It’s not the elderly or the less qualified people that move away, but it’s the “young and hungry”. The “best heads” of a region leave, “brain drain” happens.

They do not move away from their home region because they don’t like it or do not feel at home there. But they see better chances for to find their personal luck in the “hot spots” of economic activity, in the capital cities and global marketplaces.

Finally the most innovative, creative and successful people are away from the region and so is their knowledge. Often even the region of origin has had to cover the costs for education, whereas the destination cities get highly educated and motivated new “taxpayers”. The gap between the “remote” and the “central” regions continuously gets bigger.

Is there a way to stop the brain drain?

Will young people stay in their home villages just because they have internet access there? Sure not!

But ICT allows people to stay in contact, to read their local newspaper although they are somewhere else, to keep in touch with their friends and school mates.

By staying in contact, by keeping connected to their roots, these persons have the chance to stay what they are: successful global citizens and the most valuable sources of the region of their origin.

In times of globalization entering all aspects of life it is essential for the personal intention to keep contact to one’s roots to feel a strong personal identification with one’s home region. This is especially true for young people not having known much else than globalization and its effects.

To realize such an identification mutual respect is one of the major points. Mutual between the regional society on the whole and every single individual. For the individual’s respect confrontation with regional history, one’s personal roots is the basis.

Maybe even some people will move back to their region later on – but this will not be the first step of a development. But those migrants can be “ambassadors” of their region “out there”, they can on the one hand spread the information how outstanding their region is and on the other hand communicate ideas and solutions that they see somewhere else to those who “have stayed at home.”

#### 4.4 Adopt “best practise” for local and regional development

Globalization nowadays often means copying something that’s successful in one place to many other places. An example is given in the paper of Irene Rubitzki regarding IKEA-stores in Europe and China.

The question that this concept raises is: why should people in a world region “adopt” to the product of a “global player” instead of the concepts of companies adopt to the specific characteristics of regions?

Why should we keep building rivers that our ships fit in – why don’t we build ships that fit in the rivers?

Cities, countries and regions are at least as different from each other as people are – so why should all regions follow the same goals? It’s a planners task to help finding the specific characteristics of regions and to use them advantageous.

**GLOCALization**, as the authors understand it, means **intelligent adoption of concepts and ideas** to the local and regional needs, instead of having exactly

the same products and solutions everywhere.

There are already companies which act in this sense – at least their advertising says so, as the campaign of HSBC, the worlds second largest banking-group, shows – a good example on how important the local meanwhile has gotten for global players. (see Fig. 8).

Ideas and solutions developed in one region can be adopted to work in

another region - that’s what makes the “best practise”-approach so powerful.

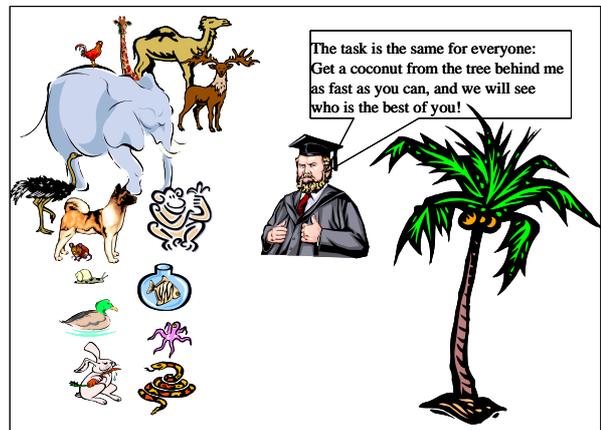


Fig. 7: The same task for everyone – is this fairness?



Fig. 8:: A global company focussing on local knowledge

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Planning has gotten more complicated and much more interesting.

The task for planners is to “gLOCALize.IT!”, to use the advantages of globalization and avoid its negative effects on a local and regional scale.

Local and global developments must not be seen as contradictions but have to be combined for a optimal positioning of a region - regional innovation and information & communication technologies are important tools for successful example of gLOCALize.IT!

gLOCALization as a concept can be widely used as a planners expertise is more needed than ever!

Another great aspect: gLOCALization does not mean a “winner-takes-it-all”-situation, a competition, where automatically the advantage of one (region) means the disadvantage of another one – by “glocalizing”, **Win-Win Situations can be realized!**

Innovation and future oriented development are based on the consciousness of regional cultural identity. ICT are important tools that can support those efforts.

As shown on the example of the Austrian Iron Route: Local and global developments are not seen as contradictions but have to be combined for an optimal positioning of a region - regional innovation and information & communication technologies are important tools for successful example of gLOCALize.IT!

Through its structured and activating work the ‘Dokumentation Eisenstraße’ shows a very interesting approach. The Austrian Iron Route, as almost every other region, has seen ups and downs in his long tradition. Now the region enters the age of gLOCALization! A bright future has just begun as a “local global player”, using the skills of its wonderful people in co-competition with regions all around the world .

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