

## Transformative regional development

Michael Ober

Main features of the project	
<b>Name of the project</b>	Transformative regional development
<b>Category</b>	Regional development
<b>Theme</b>	A new identity and a new regional awareness.
<b>Target groups</b>	Local population, local businesses
<b>Area of implementation</b>	A southeastern Austrian region in the province of Styria known as Vulkanland
<b>Leading organization(s)</b>	Association for the promotion of the Styrian Vulkanland

### Abstract

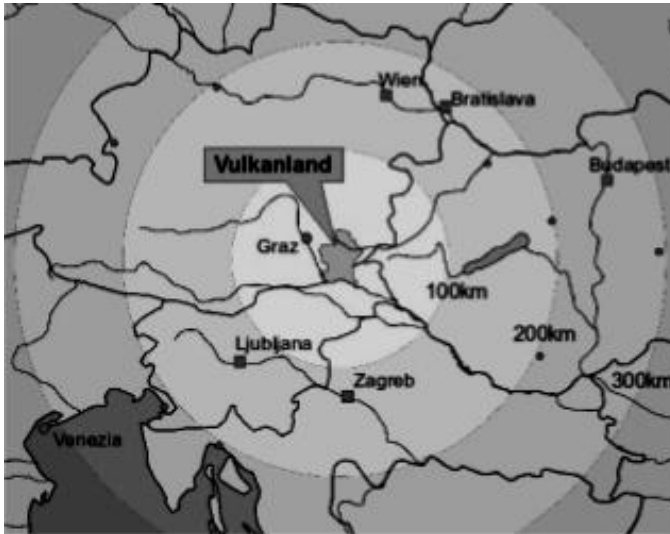
Until a few years ago, the southeastern Austrian border region was an economic backwater. Today, the region enjoys economic boom. The decisive factor for the turnaround was a regional development process that had its first steps in 1995. Suffering from low education, the national lowest income rate, no industrial development, no infrastructure (motorways, railways), little self-esteem and a lack of job opportunity, the border region was a region without any economic future. The initiators of the project wondered whether there isn't another way of measuring progress, an alternative beyond highways, factories and structural assets. Thus, a few of them got together and started imagining a future built on different standards. Project groups occurred and an educational institution was established. Due to profound research activities, the initiators came to the conclusion that thermal springs, mega-theme parks or concerns neither would entail sustainable solutions nor future-competence. Hence, the project group decided to turn their focus to their habitat – their region. To in-valuate the living space, a new identity that was representative, gained recognition and reinforced the peoples self-confidence was sought after. In 2001, the new identity "Vulkanland" was born, a node to the volcanic geology of the region. Their vision through out the entire development process was to transform the border region with little chances into an innovative, worth living region Styrian Vulkanland within a period of 15 years. In 2010, their vision seems to be achieved, 79 municipalities in the districts of Feldbach, Radkersburg, Weiz, Hartberg and Radkersburg together promote successfully local, green, self-sustaining businesses. Yet, the development process is still going on, heading for new, courageous, challenging visions. One of their aims for instance is to achieve energy independence by the year 2025.

### Key words

Transformative Development, Visioning, Regional Development, Styria, Municipality Co-operations, Process Orientation, Networking

## Introduction

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Until a few years ago, the region Styria, a province in the south east of Austria bordering Hungary and Slovenia, was an economic backwater, a buffer zone between the prosperous west of the country and its formerly communist neighbors. Today, the province is enjoying economic boom. The turnaround was generated partly by a broad based regional development project that has brought together 79 municipalities to promote local, green, self-sustaining businesses. Together the 79 municipalities constitute the region known as Vulkanland, a node to the volcanic geology of the area. Spreading over the districts Feldbach, Fürstenfeld,

Hartberg, Weiz and Radkersburg, the region covers an area of 1,157 km<sup>2</sup> with a population of about 104,000 people (STATISTIK AUSTRIA, 2010). The name of the scenic area traces back to the extinct volcanoes making the region rich of fertile soil and activating hot springs. The geological evolution of the volcanism was formed in two temporary, chemically and genetically different periods. In a first volcanic phase, the immense Gleichenberger volcano with a cross section dimension of 30 kilometer was shaped about 16 million years ago. And in the second phase, which took place between 1.7 and 3.8 million years, the Stradner Kogel emerged. The landscape, lying in the foothills of the Alps, is dominated by smooth hills, which have partly been formed by volcanoes and many small rivers. The cultural and commercial development of the region emerged consistent with the terrain. The structure of the scenery today is characterized by the alteration of nucleus of population and their associated infrastructure and the agricultural and forestry working capacities. While valleys represent the commercial centers with trade and handcraft, the sunny hillsides are primarily used for cultivating vineyards from which the excellent high quality vines are produced. In many places you can find a diversity of meadow orchards with in part very old fruit sorts. Only the monoculture in the valleys and southern slopes with their large cornfields are reminiscent of the formerly agricultural focus on pig breeding and mass production ( cp. FROHMANN/KROTSCHKE 2007; FRITZ 2006).

### Regional challenges

Due to the peripheral location and with it related proximity to the persistently dangerous border in the East, the region has been confronted with militant conflicts since medieval times. Again and again residents had to restart and rebuild their existences that had been burned by militant forces like the Turks, the Kuruzzen or the Haiduken. The many defenses but also the internal conflicts that implicated hardest economic and social strain, shaped the residents character. A live under strong material deprivation and permanent lack accompanied by persistent rebuilding and uncertainty demanded a certain robustness and patience ( cp. KRENN 1997, p. 11ff.). The historically affected strong emotional connection with their living space resulted in the emergence of a strong particular regional habitus ( cp. KERSCHBAUMER/KOBALD 2003, p. 67). In times of globalization, the before as rather regressively interpreted regional habitus turned out to be an important and precious factor of success in the transformation process. The rural topography as well as their distance from the economic centers Graz and Vienna implicated the region's less attractiveness for an industrial development at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That is why only little structural investments have been made since then. Till this day, the region has not been connected to the national highway network. There is still no industrial settlement, no commercial centre and no high-speed railway connection to

important economic metropolises. From a structural point of view, the regions level of provision of infrastructure can be compared with those of Americas in the 40s of the last century. Till Austria was joining the European Union in 1995, the border region was an economic backwater, a cheap workforce and food supplier for urban centers. It was the region with the lowest income rate and the highest rate of commuters nationwide. A region without pride, lived culture and low self-esteem, with an entirely absence of a natural feeling for regional strengths ( cp. VULKANLAND, 2004). Considering the hard facts, regional planners and scientific experts labeled it the border region without any economic future. Their future forecasts prognosticated in 1995 a decline in population of five percent by the year 2010 for the region. Not only the economic situation was depressing, also the people in the region behaved, as they had no future perspectives. A decade long pursued negative culture of moaning and blustering shoot down any upcoming future initiative. Supported by the capitalism system and their reduced “money talk”, the people remained in the belief that without money they cannot provoke anything. Waiting for external help in form of big investors and external guidance was seen as the only chance for the region to improve and so escape from its precarious situation. So far one can come to the conclusion that the regional initial position for the development project was very difficult.

### **Objectives**

In the start-up period, the project initiators were composed of a few members of present-day's managing board. They not only had the ambitious idea for the project, they also designed the strategic plan and defined the sub-goals along the successive project phases. Currently, the managing board oversees and represents the project. It holds the position of the inspiring project leader. Strengthened by the strong believe, that also rural areas are capable to determine their future on their own, the project initiators grew the desire to imagine a future built on different standards. They turned its focus away from the apparently unsolvable deficits to the by and by visible strengths of the region. The increased knowledge and with it turning away from a purely material values driven thinking, which is indeed essential, but should not dictate the way of thinking by a 100 percent, allowed the evolution of a new perception and mindset. The project objective was, along with a transformative process and a new brand for the region, to achieve the transformation from a devaluated border region to an innovative, worth living region “Styrian Vulkanland”. A sub-goal was to establish a new regional and economical positioning (quality of location) in order to become the best culinary and handcraft region of Austria. Another long-term objective was to become the region of quality of life and energy autonomy. Finally the overall vision behind it can be summarized as the transformation of the formerly border region with little chances into an innovative, worth living region Steirisches Vulkanland.

### **Partners – Networking activities**

The lead partner and at the same time funding body in the project is the Styrian Government. Further types of institutions involved are rural communities with its political stakeholders and responsibility for the administration of the measurements. Small businesses operate mainly as partners in the project and are in authority of the project implementation. Inhabitants build the wide base and are permanently involved as participants in the project. Other project partners are regional schools, universities, local associations and many more. Altogether there are currently about 10,000 people actively involved in the development process.

### **Structure**

The ASSOCIATION FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE STYRIAN VULKANLAND is the overall body of the regional development project. It is hierarchically composed of the plenum, the managing board, 16 small sub-regions and the wide base consisting of local citizens and entrepreneurs. The representatives (mayors) of the member communes together constitute the *plenum*. They ordinarily meet once in two years in order to vote and determine the strategic orientation of the association.

The *managing board* is responsible for the strategic objectives and takes the decisions. It consists of two local members of the Styrian Parliament, the head of the staffed office, an affiliate company that can be seen as the operative instrument and of about five to seven selected regional experts. The process implementation is carried out by the affiliated staffed office and by local process consultants such as agencies of different application areas like energy, process engineering, advertising, knowledge or regional management. They act as extended arms of the staffed office, working flexibly on the development process. The managing board works together with funding agencies, public agencies, government agencies, special interest groups et cetera. Central and important for the structure is the close contact between the level of decision-making and the level of process implementation in order to ensure a mutual continuing education. This design of organisational structure allows an ongoing collective learning process.

### **Funding**

The regional development process was backed among others by the Structural Funds – Objective 2, LEADER II, LEADER +, INTERREG III A, INTERREG III B CADSES and the Europe for Citizens. Funded by the European Commission's Enterprise and Industry division, the organization channels financing to private sustainable business projects and encourages businesses to develop local resources, skills and markets.

### **Awards**

In 2004, the regional development project won the *European Village Renewal Prize* themed "Breakup for uniqueness". The *Eden Award 2008* was handed on for the regions success of shaping the present while appreciating the past and the future. The nomination for the *Attersee Award 2009* was another affirmation for the successful path of the regional project.

## **Approach / Methodology**

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### **Background**

*The devaluation* - The rapid global development and the one-sided focus on monetary and material values have left one's mark on the people, their culture and their living space. Too many people regard today's lifestyle as unchangeable natural law. A consequence of this progress, that first and foremost concerns peripheral regions, is the massive devaluation of these living spaces and a demoralization of the resident people. The strategy of many countries for the devaluated peripheral regions was and still is, to install a touristic lighthouse-project in order to mobilize these areas. This kind of strategy detracted regional managers from their regional responsibility in direction of hope and help from outside. The focusing on external solutions got so powerful that one's own strengths felt into oblivion and regional deficits dominated regional planners' attention. The survival of a region solely depended on the settlement of a mega project. The efforts of its own regional businesses have neither been taken seriously nor supported, as the solution was only possible to appear from outside of the region. Keeping this process of waiting and disregarding of regional potentials last over multiple decades had the negative effect, that mental paradigms with enormous long-term effects were produced in the meantime so that a transformation process got more and more difficult.

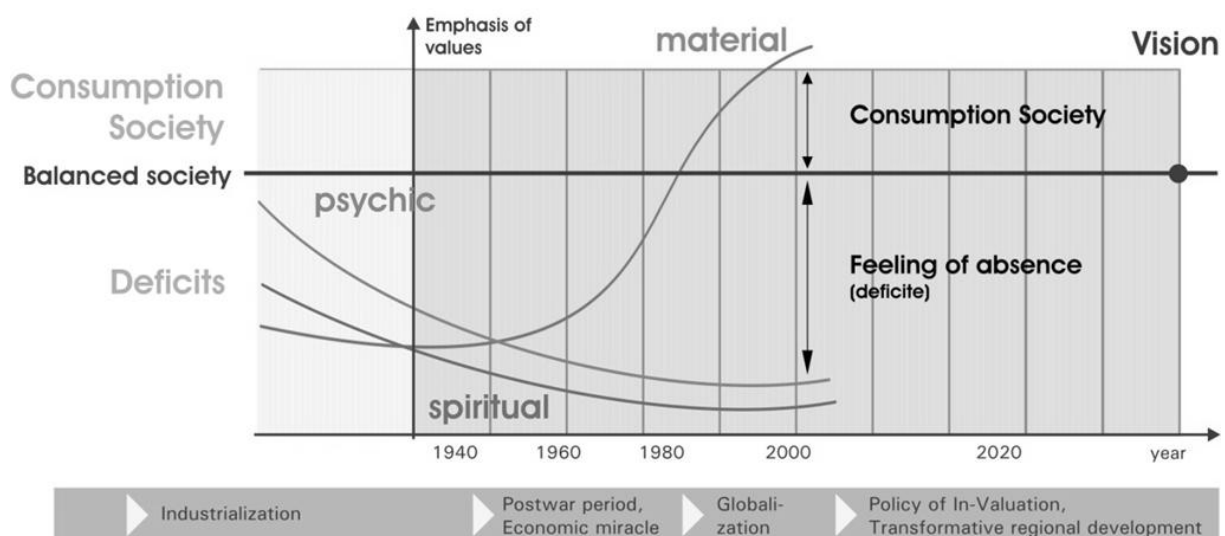
*The decision for a different future* – The initiators of the "Styrian Vulkanland" no longer wanted to go along with the mainstream. The incitement for an endogenous development was that also in peripheral areas, on the basis of human talent, their immaterial values and their natural resources as well as their economic potentials, a future must be realizable. They started searching for solutions how they could succeed in effecting the return to their living space - to their immaterial and material

values within in a manageable and affordable period. For this purpose it was necessary to conduct in-depth analysis of the region. Besides today's overemphasized hart facts, most notably importance has been given to fathom the low lying and affecting paradigms that determine the people and their actions. To understand human actions, it was important to explore the causes, and based on that to transform the possible causes, instead of permanently dealing with the problems.

*The misbelieve* - that the more the people possess and receive, the more satisfied they would be, turned out to be in reality the opposite way round. There was the simple formula: "The higher the GDP, the bigger the prosperity". This unilateral objective "material prosperity" for a long time was attended by quality of life improvements. But quality of life is not only provided by material wealth but also by immaterial values. Material goods seemed to be able to replace nearly anything. In fact since the 1960s, the more goods people obtained, the less satisfied they got. Today our society complains its situation and moans on a highest, unprecedented opulence level. As a development according to this "old" pattern would just have initiated new situations of dissatisfaction, the regional actors had no intention to follow this path.

*Impoverishment in times of material prosperity* – The described condition was identified as a new impoverishment in material prosperity. The insight: inner, spiritual emptiness cannot be replaced by outside abundance. Increased options degenerated our sense for orientation and focus for essential things. The result: we do everything at the same time but in fact nothing. External incentives dictate our life. Losing sight of our target was answered by increases in speed. This means that our modern life is affected by tempo previous to direction and quantity previous to quality. If everything gets stuck we increase tempo in order that the dynamic gives us the missing feeling that something is happening; whereto is not important. Another aspect in this context is the *loss of perceptual capability* for the proximity. A phenomenon that is reflected in the belief that only the large, the far away, the modern, the build up, the other is seen as desirable. The loss in perceptual capacity implicates an enormous devaluation of the own person, of own talents, of own potentials, of the own living space and the own culture. Along with the proceeding loss in perceptual capacity for the proximate the connectivity gets lost and an unconscious separation dynamic appears. People distance themselves from their living space, their culture, their rituals, neglect their identity, regional talents dwarf and finally they leave the region.

## Mass consumption of material values is not able to compensate psychic-spiritual deficits!



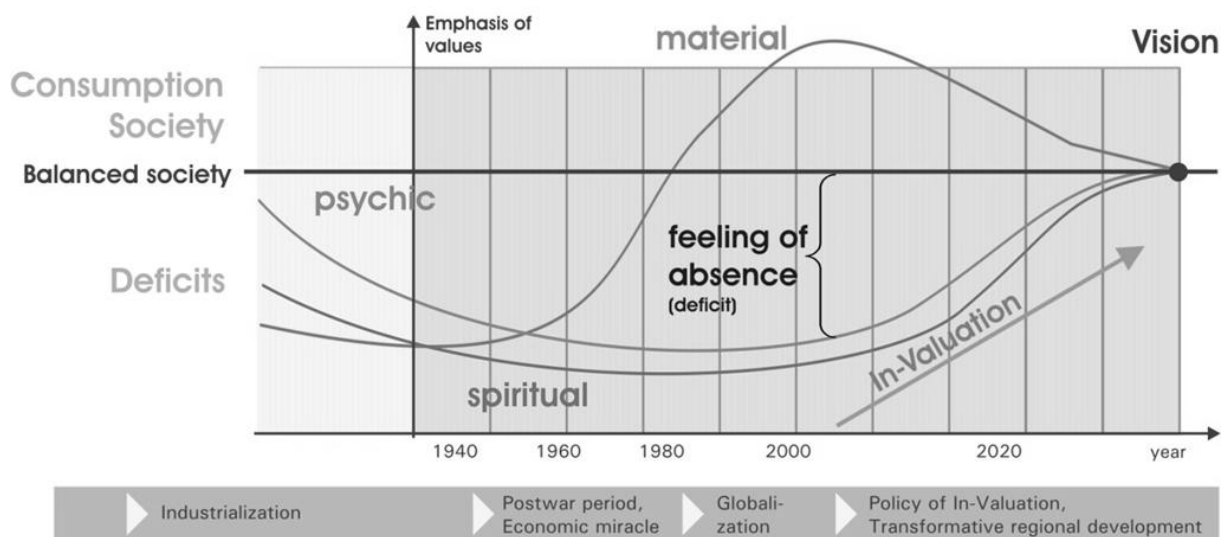
**Figure 1: Inner emptiness (feeling of absence) inspite of enormous increases in material values** (translated figure from: KROSCHECK ET AL., 2007, p.8)

*False scarcity* – Despite explosively increased material options, people seem to be infested with a deep inner dissatisfaction. Whilst our material scope has risen, our (spiritual) relatedness with our environment and ourselves has been disregarded. Not having attached importance to our immaterial values, we suppose there is a lack in material values. The outcome is an overwhelming drive to more growth in a limited world. The attempt to allay the spiritual desire on a false path results in a shopping binge labeled as “*consumption society*”. A consumption society without meaning and value produces senselessness and value-lessness ( cp. KROTSCHKE ET AL., 2007).

### New Insights

The investigated solution to overcome the feeling of insufficiency and dissatisfaction turned out to be a new policy of “in-valuation”. According to the initiators of the development project, the “*in-valuation*”, a new word creation, was an essential component of the whole process. In the transformation context, it implies two key components. First of all there is the appraisal of the existing. It assumes, that value and significance only arise by appraisal and esteem. Secondly, it postulates to give “the existing”, for example a region with its natural resources, economic potentials, human talents and cultural heritage, a new future orientated significance through a new, modern interpretation. The, with the process implicated intense identification recreates identity and makes authentic. This certain feeling of identity and being connected with the living space induces the society’s ability to overcome the fake paradigms of a “consumption society” and the “false scarcity/feeling of insufficiency”. As figure one illustrates, the in-valuation process brings our society back to a natural balance of material and immaterial values. The recovered balance creates a new inner satisfaction, which is the nutrient solution of any successful sustainable development process.

**Mass consumption of material values is not able to compensate psychic-spiritual deficits!**



**Figure 2: To overcome the feeling of insufficiency through „in-valuation“** (translated figure from: KROTSCHKE ET AL., 2007, p.12)

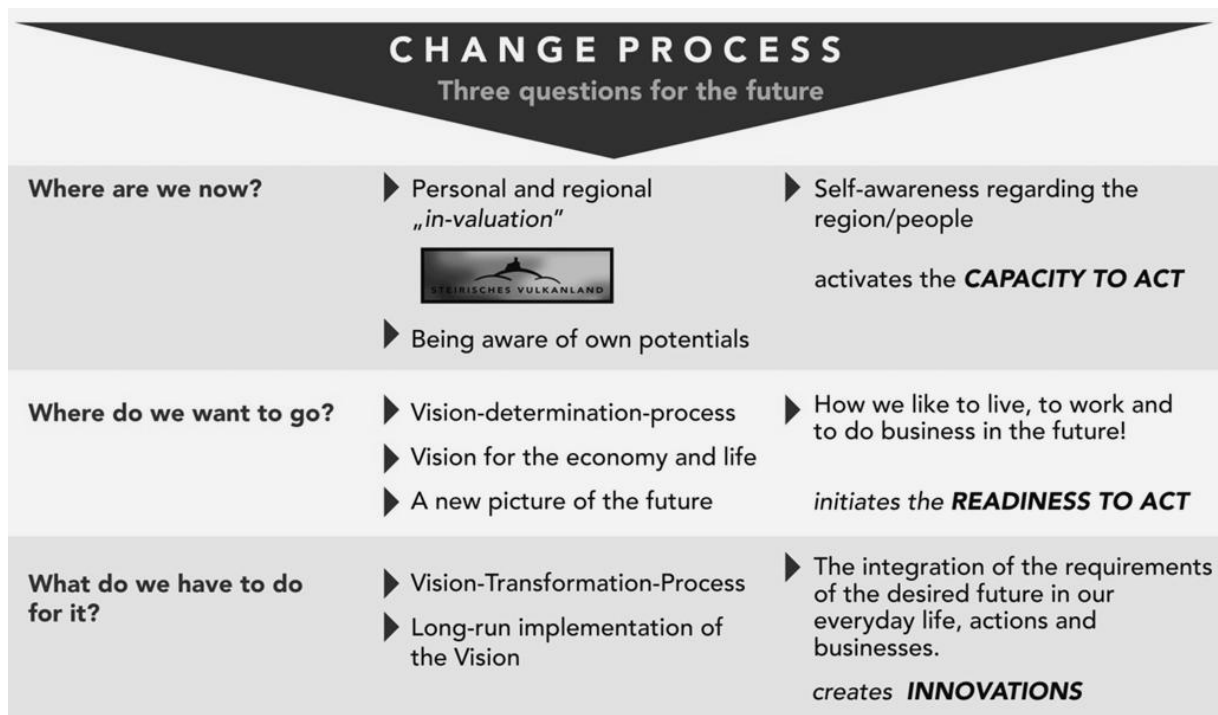
### Transformation Process

Due to the background and the new insights it became for the project leaders quite clear, that the settlement of a mega-project only would be a temporary, short-dated solution. That is why the project leaders opted for the more difficult and long-run path - a transformative process, which required the participation of the regional population.

The first step was to address the issue: **Where are we now?** Next to hard facts, figures, and data, special attention was given to buried, soft, immaterial values. Profound research activities turned the focus to the regions deficits in infrastructure and economy. Immaterial values that were abounded, were not subject to any assessment, even worse, they were not worth to deal with. The GDP was the only measure that should determine the regions destiny. Increased reflection of the own living space during the in-valuation phase revealed more and more regional specifics. In-depth examinations discovered enormous economic potentials and expertise in the fields of culinary, handcraft and tourism. Knowledge about the deficits and strengths and the necessary endogenous development process required a bundling of the forces and the concentration on important common future themes. After the analysis phase, which opened the eyes for the own potentials, a diversified civil participation process with topical task groups should fathom the peoples feeling for the future potentials. Despite the large attendance, the outcome of the discussions was that without money nothing could be changed. The work groups spotlighted, how devaluated the region was and how low the self-confidence of the citizens was. The missing belief in the own capability to develop made any future discussion impossible. The project team realized that without a revaluation of the region, no development could happen. Therefore they initiated a profound in-valuation process to channel the one-sided material focus and the extroversion to inner values and an endogenous development. The rediscovery of the ability to recognize the immediate, the proximity, own potentials, the own living space was thereby of special interest. Moreover, it was important for the in-valuation phase to find a strong medium of identification. It was found by renaming the region "Styrian Vulkanland". The regained self-awareness activated the **CAPACITY TO ACT**.

The next step was to answer the question: **Where do we want to go?** If a region has no vision to strive for, to mutually wish for, that is worth to achieve, then there is no motive to collectively exert. If there is no vision, then there is also an absence of affiliated values. It is a strong vision that creates values. Furthermore is it impossible to concentrate one's energy, as permanently appearing and highly powerful acting centrifugal force eliminate any unification process. An absolute and strong vision initiates the **READINESS TO ACT**.

The last question that had to be asked was: **What do we have to do for it?** The vision, that represents the overall frame of the target, had to be broken down into several sub-goals. For the implementation of the vision it was of importance to integrate the requirements of the desired future into the everyday life, actions and businesses. The transformation of the desired future induces a creative process in which **INNOVATIONS** are likely to grow. The concept of the transformation process is illustrated in figure two (VULKANLAND, 2010b).



**Figure 3: Detailed stages of the development process & learning activities in the Vulkanland process**  
(translated figure from: KROTSCHKE ET AL., 2007, p.7)

1994 – 1999 INITIAL PHASE – Regional actors realized that investments in regional lighthouse projects (thermal springs) didn't bring about the economic mercy for the whole area they pledged. Only in a small circumference around the thermal springs, the economic situation improved. The bulk of the area in-between got away empty-handed. A few of the regional actors got together and started to take matters into their own hands. Based on one commune and 200 participants, a vast awareness raising and personality development offensive through formal learning activities like seminars, lecture in formal education system was initiated. First local projects were used to practice self-contained development, to develop ideas and to learn to work together with nearby communes. Finally, 14 communes together founded the first small-scale region with now 1,200 participants. The implementation of the action programs and concepts required a formal project team. An office and at the same time educational establishment for public qualification was set up.

1999 – 2000 ANALYSIS PHASE – It is used for varied scientific analysis in the process. With the aid of scientific experts the project team tried to explore the regions strengths and weaknesses. The aim was to find the regions' fields of competence and with it its future positioning. Providing a holistic picture of the region, the focus was not only on hard facts and figures but also on soft facts like mental attitudes, the prevailing mood, and immaterial potentials such as talents, skills and values. In addition, ten workshops with different themes and 2,000 participants involved were hold. Strategic projects for overall-regional development were initiated. Positive media coverage about successful solution statements supported the upturn. Collective moaning and apportioning of blame lost weight. The return to the nurturing living space started to take effect.

2000 – 2002 VISION PHASE – More and more communes followed up. Reclaimed values struggled for a new identity. For the collective acceptance and with it the success of the whole process it was important to ensure a high identification of the population with the targets of the process and thus the region itself (TISCHERET. AL, 2006, p.51). The new regional identity "Styrian Vulkanland", a node to the volcanic geology of the area, was established. At this time, the region comprised three districts with 66 communes and about 85,000 inhabitants. Eight thematically future workshops built the basis for a two year continuing idea generation process. Not single mega projects, but area-wide action programs were sought after. Culinary, handcraft and culture tourism turned out to be the future



competence fields of the region. In conclusion, guide values for an independent living, working and business culture were adopted. Knowledge management became the important learning instrument for future development and cross-regional networking.

2002 – 2005 IN-VALUATION PHASE – can be seen as the heart of the transformation process. Its aim is to give the residents back their value and dignity. No more than from an in-validated region, the readiness to act arises, from which a new future can be generated. It is so to say the nutrient solution for any development. For this reason, the project team created a regional marketing concept targeting on value adding messages. The messages and particular wording were applied in seminars, on poster, in the local media, as well as in motivating and inspiring speeches. An important statement through out the process for instance was and still is “What in this region grows, has value!”.

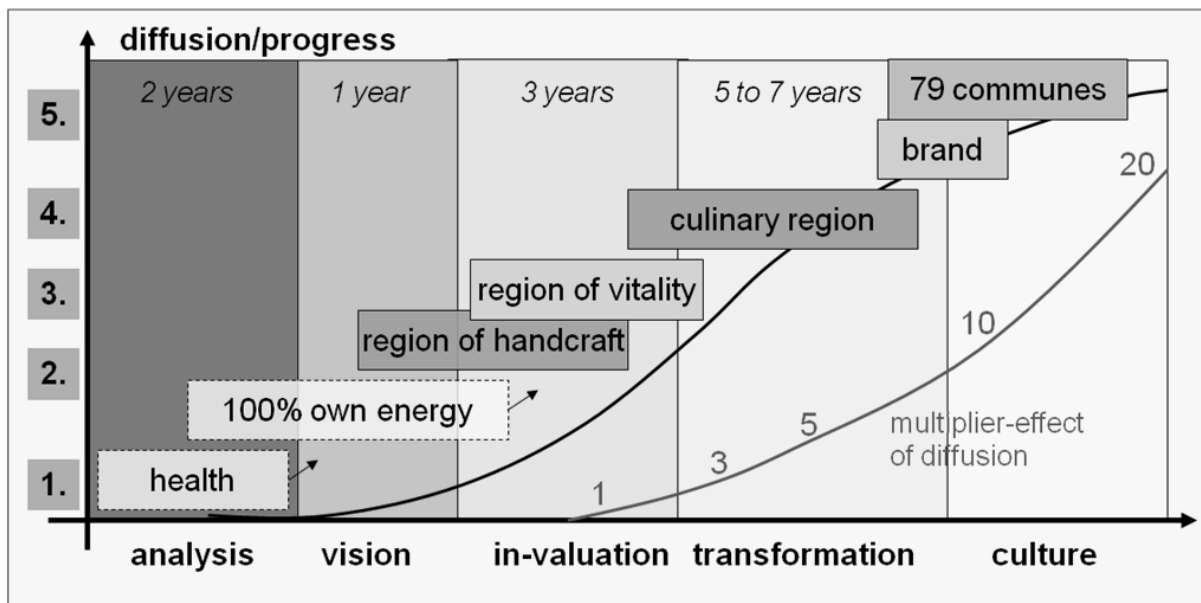


Figure 4: The single stages of the development process (translated figure from: VULKANLAND, 2010a)

2005 – 2011 TRANSFORMATION PHASE – The transformation phase is used to integrate the shared vision in our everyday life, actions, and economic activities. It is the ability to suit the action to the word. For that purpose the desired future has to be refined into many small sub-goals or actions and implemented step by step over a period of five to seven years. Workshops, seminars, speeches, networking, and other motivating and inspiring programs support the implementation.

2011 – CULTURE PHASE – The culture phase can be seen as the time when the desired vision is reality. It expresses in a new performance resulting from the whole process. Figure two below illustrates the individual stages of the development process and its rate of penetration (VULKANLAND, 2004; VULKANLAND, 2010a).

The in-valuation encourages regarding the life and the living space in a new way. Without adding vast material values and new assets, the in-valuation of the existing achieved an astonishing increase in material and immaterial value. New *values* lead to a new *philosophy*. Out of the newly attained philosophy emerged a new *language*. The set off creativity gave rise to a new *design* and eventually to new *innovations*.

## Research activities

Through out the process, different research disciplines such as education, social science, business, health and social welfare and quality of life have been addressed. In doing so, research methods such

as interviews, analysis, questionnaires, surveys, and experiments came into operation. As an important benefit through research, the knowledge management can be designated. It provided insights and interpretations from the progress of the process. Received results allowed a constant refinement of the future strategies in view of the main vision.

## **Project discussion**

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So far, the case study highlighted only the success story and an apparent easy proceeding of the development project. At this point, also the negative aspects of the process, like constraints, criticism, refusal, and other difficulties, the project leaders were faced with, are going to be mentioned. The project discussion will include a listing of the success factors and its innovative aspects. Moreover, challenges of the project are going to be addressed in this section.

### **Constraints**

As a matter of fact, profound transformations in most cases encounter resistance. It is a natural human behavior, as new approaches at the one hand destroy general shared worldviews and on the other hand hold some uncertainty and unpredicted risks. That is one explanatory model, why regional governments spend vast amounts of money on solving social and economic problems and therewith maintain the status quo, instead of investing in future development processes in order to anticipate and get over present deficits. According to an interview with the managing board of the project, the following three constraints have been seen as the most important constraints in the implementation of the transformative development process (VULKANLAND, 2010b).

1. Integral regional development is a regions' political mission and should be in such a way regulated by law and to be provided with a fix budget in the long run.
2. If there occurs a problem, a lot of money is allocated for its reparation. However, for anticipatory development processes no money is provided.
3. The permanent struggle to achieve a minimum budget to carry on with the process demands a great deal of the management's time and motivation.

### **Success factors**

The success of the Vulkanland depends among other things on keeping up momentum by promoting programs that motivate the local inhabitants to participate in the project. For instance, the project group holds competition to reward energy-saving projects. A transformative approach with emphasis on a visioning and in-valuation phase is the key success factor of the whole development process. Further innovative aspects of the project are:

- A broad participation of the regional population (104,000 people).
- Non-party cooperation between several communes of the region.
- The establishment of a network of cross-communal education and cohesion.
- Strong self-assurance due to one's own awareness of own strengths and values.
- Concentration on regional strengths and focus on few, but fundamental future themes.
- Installation of a regional knowledge management and regional evaluation commission.
- A long run transformative "in-valuation" process (at least over a period of 10 years).
- Strong personal interest and commitment of the leadership/managing board for the project

### **Challenges**

Challenges are a natural element and natural reaction of any process of change. These randomly arising phenomena are described as a form of creative stress. It is a highly energized condition that occurs, when a status quo is going to be transformed into the desired future. In the Vulkanland case, the initial challenges turned out to be an active involvement of the local population and the continuous funding. During the implementation, significant challenges have been the cooperation of the 79 communities within the region, the profound and intense involvement with the region, as well as the ongoing process of implementation and communication of the shared vision. The most important challenge was and still is, to keep up momentum by promoting programs and inspiring the participants.

## **Conclusions**

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### **Results**

The during the regional development project investigated and designed transformative development approach is a way to successfully transform any peripheral region without any future chances into a region with strong identity, high quality of live and economic boost. Some evidence for the effectiveness and success of the approach demonstrate the latest economic data in 2009. The brand Vulkanland had, according to a comprehensive survey in 2008 (VULKANLAND 2008) a degree of brand awareness of 97 %. Feldbach, the heart of the Vulkanland was 2010 the region with the highest rate of business start-ups (8,2 %) all over Styria (WIRTSCHAFTSKAMMER STEIERMARK 2009, p.25). According to a future forecast of Austria's demographic development, the Region Vulkanland will be able to slightly increase its population, while a good portion of the other peripheral regions like Murau, Mürzzuschlag, Leoben, and Judenburg are going to face emigration shares of more than 15 % till 2050 ( cp. ÖROK-OUTLOOK 2010).

### **Lessons learned**

“Don't hesitate, be courageous and start imagining a future build on your ideals today, even if all the extern experts around you illustrate a gloomy future for your region”, is the lesson learned from the Vulkanland process. It is true that it is easier to bellyache about the present situation but it will not change it. Moreover it has be kept in mind, that this form of development is a process that takes time - a period of a least ten years. Further it is required to agree on a common shared vision that seems strong and attractive enough being achieved. It will guide you like a compass and give orientation even in turbulent water. If you now think you can easily draw a straight line right from the beginning to the desired target (vision) and strictly work off the successive predetermined packages of measures, you will be disappointed. Setbacks and challenges are part of the process as operative sub-goals and milestones. Resolving them is a form of continuous learning and essential to get new insights and deeper understanding of the process. Therefore a vision can only be a frame that determines the way but not how to reach it. This is an important advice especially in terms of regional development, as people need to have the feeling of being an important part of the whole process and are able to contribute to its shaping.

A last advice is: stay persevering even if you think the obstacles seem to be insuperable. It is a law of nature that the closer you get to achieve your objectives, the stronger the countermovement will be (law of cause and effect).

### **Impact on sustainable development**

SOCIAL - Value and dignity has been given back to the devaluated habitat and their inhabitants. The "in-valuation process" brought about new awareness about the qualities of their own region. Through the "transformation process" a new action and innovation readiness could emerge.

ENVIRONMENAL - The relationship between the people and their environment has been restored and a new energy and resource awareness is emerging. For example regional production, short routs of transport and local economic cycles.

ECONOMIC - The aim is to improve the regional value creation from currently 25% to 50% by the year 2020. It will be achieved through a refinement of local resources in the fields of energy, food, handcraft, tourism and through a boost in local consumption.

## What is your key success innovation?

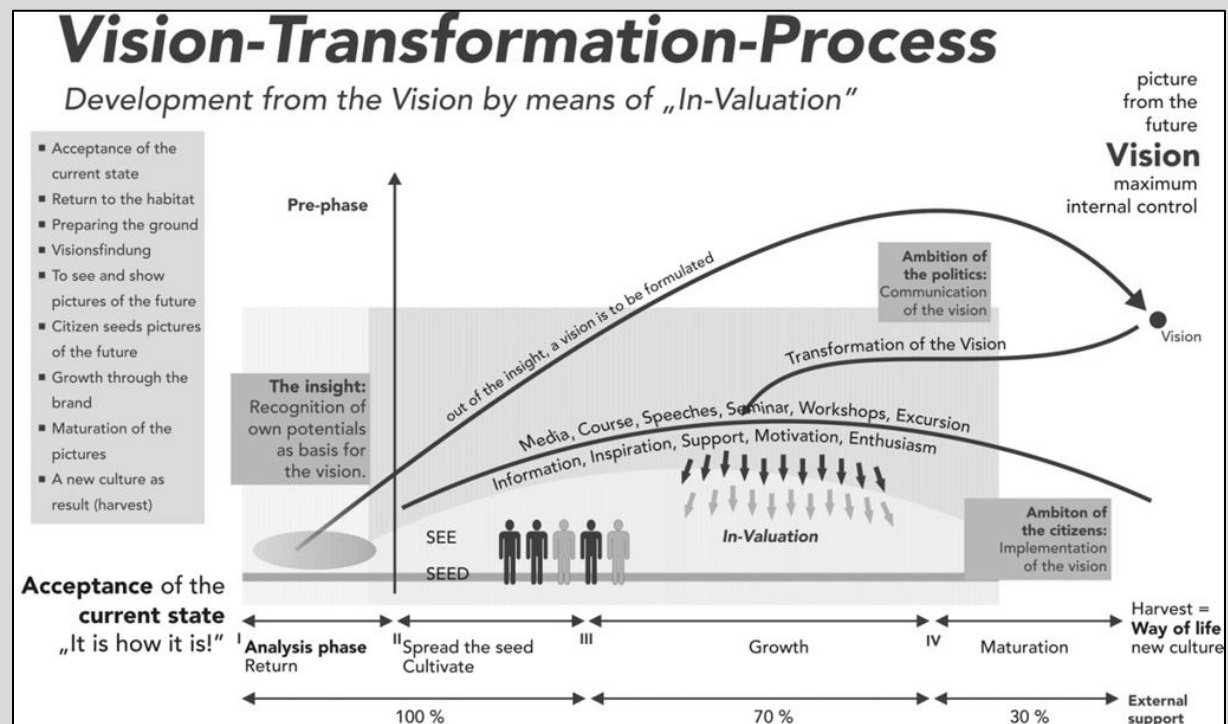


Figure 5: The „Vision-Transformation-Process“ in the region Styrian Vulkanland (KROTSCHKE ET AL., 2007, p.81; translated)

The concept „vision-transformation“ describes that pace in the process at which the livable vision is integrated into everyday life and implemented over years step by step. This kind of integration is going to be succeeded through consequent and long-time awareness rising – as long as a modified perception leads to a modified behaviour and with it results in a new culture. In the course of the vision-transformation the desire for the NEW arises. People start focusing their attention on the desired future and attempt to integrate the requirements of the wished future in their daily life, actions and economic activities. The outcome of this is a readiness to change and an intrinsic vision for each by one ( cp. KROTSCHKE ET AL., 2007).

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