



Rural-Urban Outlooks: Unlocking Synergies (ROBUST)

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Snapshot: Expressions of Urban – Peri-Urban – Rural Relationships

CULTURE 24

Metropolitan Area of Styria, Austria

1. Brief Description

CULTURE 24 is a network of people from the cultural field in the surrounding municipalities of Graz. It was founded through a LEADER project in the period 2007-2013 and became an exemplary cultural project of the Local Action Group (LAG) 'Hügel- und Schöcklland', in the eastern part of the Austrian case study. The LAG 'Hügel- und Schöcklland' includes 12 municipalities and approximately 50,000 inhabitants. Within the current LEADER period (2014-2020), the project focuses on encouraging the endogenous potential of the network participants.

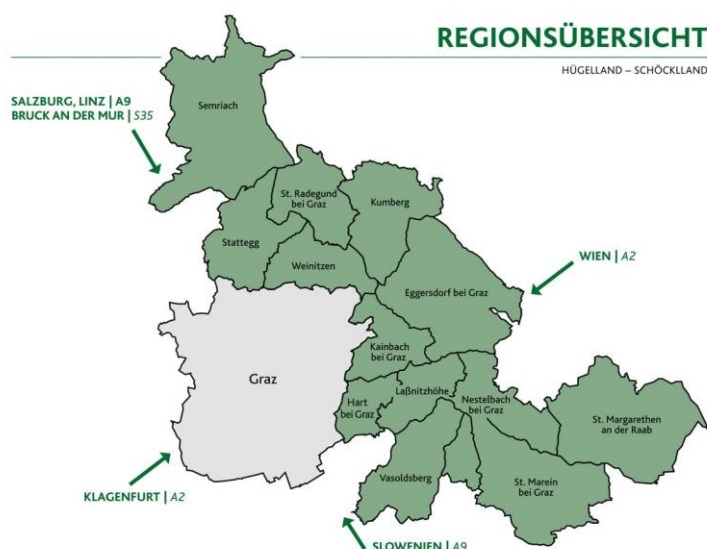


Figure 1: 'Hügel- und Schöcklland' - 12 municipalities in the surrounding of Graz (<https://www.huegelland.at/region/>)

The main goals of the initiative are to build a basis for active networking amongst cultural and creative professionals, to create an active cultural life in this peri-urban area, to implement common projects, and to get to know new project partners within and outside the region.

The activities started with a small community of artists within the region but have now evolved to be a broad network beyond the borders of the LAG 'Hügel- und Schöcklland'. The network

has expanded to the city of Graz and strengthens cultural exchange on a national and international level.

The network is active through recurrent meetings in alternating locations of the region. These encounters are professionally guided by the LAG team and external experts, who consult artists, for instance in the field of self-marketing. Besides professional assistance, the artists have the opportunity to exchange informally amongst one other. CULTURE 24 has therefore supported the creation of many initiatives and brought cultural professionals together for cooperation. Thus, not only creativity and innovation increased but also a broad cultural programme was established in this rural-urban area.

2. Questions and/or Challenges

The main objective of the project is to fully integrate the potential of the local and regional artists and cultural professionals. With the help of professional group mentoring, the project participants should be encouraged to, firstly, exchange information and ideas amongst each other and secondly, present themselves as one local cultural institution both within and beyond the region. A further desired outcome is to implement multiple cooperation projects. Several targets have been specified to monitor development of the project during this LEADER programme period:

- Subgroups, specialising on specific focus areas.
- The implementation of one large umbrella network that combines Styrian, Austrian and European cultural networks.
- The disciplines of craftsmanship and art trading are considered separately in the whole group.
- Periodic meetings on different topics address interests of individual artists.
- CULTURE 24 has evolved towards a well-known brand, which is especially known in Graz and its surroundings for its cultural engagement.
- The cultural network developed a programme to integrate culture into daily life.
- The network participants are active in other regional projects and a committee observes this integration process.
- The tasks of the group can be divided into the following segments (with respective weights): Networking (20%), implementation of cultural events (30%), improvement of the appearance of the region (20%), integration in different project approaches (20%) and development of market potential (10%).

The cultural network undertakes integrative and communication-oriented tasks, like integrating children and young people, migrants, and people with disabilities.

3. Main Insights

3.1. Indications of the application of the new concept of 'New Localities'

As a LEADER project, CULTURE 24 activities are oriented to the area of the LAG 'Hügel- und Schöcklland'. However, the cultural network is seen as an open institution and invites

citizens and other creative professionals from beyond the LAG area. The success of the project during the first years made it possible to extend the network to the city of Graz, which is highly important for many artists. The rural-urban linkage in the field of culture is crucial for many creative professionals. First of all, the artists' network can be expanded towards the urban environment, which enhances job and cooperation opportunities and access to new knowledge. The rural environment, however, offers many creative professionals a high living and working quality, a quiet atmosphere, and small-scaled structures which can facilitate creative processes due to informal exchange of knowledge.

The rural-urban linkages enable the cultural network to be broader in the sense of quantity, as well as diversity, since a wide variety of professions can be found within the network. Therefore, artists will find an exchange of knowledge and information on an interdisciplinary level.

In addition to the qualitative increase made possible through the cultural network, CULTURE 24 also aims to expand spatially beyond the borders of the LAG 'Hügel- und Schöcklland' by fostering intercommunal cooperation beyond the LEADER region's area. As mentioned above, there is a strong link with the city of Graz, but also with provincial and national networks. On the one hand, the network motivates artists from Graz (with a specific focus on artists and groups from the outer districts of the city) to join the cultural group. On the other hand, CULTURE 24 cooperates with events in the city, like the 'Aufsteirern Festival' ('Elevate Styrian culture'), which is an event to celebrate the Styrian culture and traditions, and the yearly Christmas markets in the city. Beyond that, there is also cooperation and linkages to the national level, through activities with the 'Steiermark Frühling' (Styrian spring) and the 'Styrian Week' in Vienna, where the province of Styria and its traditional food, wine and craftsmanship are promoted. The artists either participate actively in these events by exhibiting their products or acting as promoters as representatives of CULTURE 24.

The cultural network also pursues the target to extend the network on a European level. The cultural association ACHTECK (the German expression for 'octagon'), is one example of an initiative that arose out of the CULTURE 24 network and pursues an international approach. Every year, ACHTECK invites artists from the countries of the 'European Capitals of Culture' to perform in the region of 'Hügel- und Schöcklland'. Within a transnational and multidisciplinary project, the aspects of these countries are presented in this rural region of Styria. The event, of course, provides a valuable opportunity for local artists to network and exchange on creative approaches beyond the regional and national borders. Furthermore, the local population profits from this event with international cultural performances and observations of exchange between local and international artists.

3.2. Insights related to the broad area of 'Smart Development'

CULTURE 24 follows explicitly the concept of smart development, since the overall objectives of the project are to encourage endogenous potential, to implement a broad network of artists specialising in a range of different fields and to commit to enhance spatial

linkages, not only within the LAG 'Hügel- und Schöcklland', but also on a regional level, especially towards the city of Graz, and on a national and European level.

The CULTURE 24 network aims to connect creative professionals within and outside the region, so they can exchange knowledge and information, as well as start new co-operations. Therefore, the network contributes to embedding artists in the place-specific cultural legacies and more recent linkages towards external influences and inspiration. This approach is conceived to increase the cultural offerings in the region (particularly in its rural parts) but also to incite reflection and interest on alternative cultural approaches and representation. Cultural amenities, framed in a modern way that pays attention to the multitude of international developments and reflected by local specific interpretation, might be a crucial incentive for young people to stay in their community or region. It might also encourage them to stay connected to their home town, while living in different regions for educational or employment reasons. This implies that the CULTURE 24 network could contribute to minimise out-migration of young and well-educated people and to keep contact and interest with "home communities" (Fidlschuster et al. 2015, 20ff.).

Another aim of the network is to develop the environment and enhance beneficial ecological performance. This might include restoring vernacular architecture, often primarily seen in action by embellishing vacant buildings or abandoned premises and objects that seemingly serve no apparent purpose anymore. In some cases, covering derelict houses or objects with an artistically decorated tarp can be seen. This trend mainly is carried out through a work of art that is printed on the tarp but could also include advertisement for exhibitions and other content. The examples cited are just illustrations of how members of the cultural network might become visible in public space of their city or community and contribute to local cultural expressions (in unusual places).

Since another focus area of the region is the concept of 'Slow Region' (Büttner 2012, 216), which includes the principles of Slow Food and awareness for healthy and regional food, a collaboration with the artists of CULTURE 24 seemed like a good supplement. With the festival "eat'n'ART", the cultural network tries to combine art, music, literature and traditional craftsmanship with local food production and traditional cooking. The approach imported from Germany is applied in various smaller rural municipalities and in the city of Graz.

These are two of many examples of the CULTURE 24 activities that create positive effects in the region. In the long run, these repeated events and cultural local-specific expressions might bear spatial effects and manifest in demographic, social, economic and cultural changes. Due to raising cultural awareness by intensifying cultural programmes and anchoring a cultural network, local attractiveness might increase endogenous potential could be increasingly nurtured and out-migration might not be anymore the prime option in remote places. Furthermore, intercommunal and interdisciplinary cooperation could be fostered, creativity and innovation developed and new business ideas could find an environment to flourish.

3.3. Other insights that could be relevant for further work

CULTURE 24 emerged from the idea to address and connect the cultural and creative professionals in the region. Since the cultural potential of the region was immense but not yet used, several artists and cultural professionals dedicated themselves at a first meeting to engage in cultural development. The memorial year of Johann Joseph Fux, who was a famous composer, born in a municipality of the LEADER region “Hügel- und Schöcklland”, was taken as an occasion to organise thematic musical and cultural events in cooperation with established local institutions. Another result was the creation of a new food product, the FUX-chocolate, by members of CULTURE 24 together with local food producers.

Over the course of the years, members have created subgroups on specific topics, like craftsmanship or fashion design. That is, for instance, how a regional traditional costume for the region Hügelland, in the east of Graz, was developed.

A common cooperative design for CULTURE 24 and its members, which represents the artists and gives them a recognition value, as well as the support of the cultural group and its strong presence on various events and the promotion of its members, led to some of the artists being able to further develop their ideas and set up their own business.

A crucial intention of the cultural group is to transform the region into an area where art and culture are present in public space. From the beginning, the group has found several places in the region to make art and culture visible and accessible for the local population, starting with the hairdressing salon, the supermarket, and on top of the regional mountain.

The CULTURE 24 network has set clear goals until 2022 to further develop a dynamic and active regional network that has the power to implement cultural activities and art all over the region. However, the network does not only want to augment cultural events and action in quantity, but also contribute to diversity and critical cultural interpretation. Therefore, a crucial goal is to diversify the network through gender mainstreaming, providing access for disabled people, and engaging specifically with migrants, youth and elderly people.

According to the initiator of CULTURE 24, the cultural professionals have not been connected before the network was created. The artists had concentrated their work on event places in the city and had very limited contact with other artists nor exchanged experience (within the region and even less beyond). Nowadays, the cultural network offers a platform for new creative processes and business opportunities. Most of the artists are not driven by a sense of competition, but by cooperation and learning from each other.

Another important aspect of the project is the “openness” of the creative approach, implying that there are no particular restrictions on the type, scope and topics of the creative projects, which should enable new and innovative results.

4. Data Sources and Indicators

Table 1 Data / Indicators for CULTURE 24

Data / Indicator	Source
Project description	LAG Hugel- und Schocklland (2015a) Kultur 24, LEADER Projektbeschreibung, erstellt am 05.10.2015. Lanitzhohle. https://www.huegelland.at/leader/projekte-und-veranstaltungen/604-1916-kultur24/
Progress-report	LAG Hugel- und Schocklland (2016) Kultur 24, LEADER Zwischenbericht, erstellt am 20.05.2016. Lanitzhohle.
Documentation about all organised events	Eventflyers, invitations, etc.
Portraits of artists	Small brochures with description about the artists And online: https://www.huegelland.at/gruppen/kultur24/

5. Critical Appraisal of Data Use

The management of LAG “Hugel- und Schocklland”, the project leader, has a detailed database of the participating artists and their achievements, the project meetings and the progress of the group. Furthermore, there is clear documentation about all of the events that have been organised within the cultural network. In preparing the rapid appraisal and these short reports, the Living Lab team was able to connect CULTURE 24 with a local festival manager whose goal is to extend the festival programme to rural areas. Therefore, the collected experience of the cultural group can be used in the case study in WP3 to broaden the cultural network, to improve the offer of cultural events and to promote rural-urban cultural linkages in the Metropolitan Area of Styria.

6. References

The information in this report is based on the LEADER project description of CULTURE 24 (LAG Hugel- und Schocklland (2015a), the progress report, the website of the LAG ‘Hugel- und Schocklland’ (LAG Hugel- und Schocklland 2015b) as well as on statements of the management team of the LAG ‘Hugel- und Schocklland’.

Buttner, S. M. (2012) Mobilizing Regions, Mobilizing Europe. Expert knowledge and scientific planning in European regional development. Abingdon: Routledge

Fidlschuster, L., Dax, T. and Oedl-Wieser, T. (2015) Demografischer Wandel, Diversitat und Entwicklungsfahigkeit landlicher Regionen, in: Egger, R. and Posch, A. (eds.), Lebensentwurfe im landlichen Raum. Ein prekarer Zusammenhang? Lernweltforschung Band 18. Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 7-28. <http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9783658105235>

LAG Hügel- und Schöckland (2015a) Kultur 24, LEADER Projektbeschreibung, erstellt am 05.10.2015. Laßnitzhöhe.

LAG Hügel- und Schöckland (2015b) 604-19/16 KULTUR24. Web-site presentation. Laßnitzhöhe. <https://www.huegelland.at/leader/projekte-und-veranstaltungen/604-1916-kultur24/>

LAG Hügel-und Schöckland (2016) Kultur 24, LEADER Zwischenbericht, erstellt am 20.05.2016. Laßnitzhöhe.

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