



# COLLABORATIVE GOVERNANCE ACROSS SECTORS: REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM AS COMPLEMENTARY POLICY FIELDS?

Elisabeth Gruber<sup>1</sup> , Dominik Ebenstreit<sup>2</sup> , Michael Fischer<sup>3</sup>, Florian Grösswang<sup>4</sup>, Martin Heintel<sup>2</sup> ,  
Harald Payer<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> University of Innsbruck  
Innrain 52, 6020 Innsbruck: Austria  
[elisabeth.eg.gruber@uibk.ac.at](mailto:elisabeth.eg.gruber@uibk.ac.at)

<sup>2</sup> University of Vienna, Department of Geography and Regional Research  
Universitätsstraße 7/5, 1010 Vienna: Austria  
[dominik.ebenstreit@univie.ac.at](mailto:dominik.ebenstreit@univie.ac.at) • [martin.heintel@univie.ac.at](mailto:martin.heintel@univie.ac.at)

<sup>3</sup> Austrian Agency for Regional Consultancy, ÖAR  
Lindengasse 56/18-19, 1070 Vienna: Austria  
[fischer@oear.at](mailto:fischer@oear.at) • [payer@oear.at](mailto:payer@oear.at)

<sup>4</sup> Gruber-Grösswang Consulting  
Lambachstraße 5, 8833 Teufenbach-Katsch: Austria  
[florian.groesswang@ggc-group.cc](mailto:florian.groesswang@ggc-group.cc)

**Abstract.** The regional level has gained importance as a governance level in Austria in recent years. Social challenges such as climate protection, mobility, sustainable economic development, demographic change, integration, digitalization and much more can no longer be mastered by single municipalities due to their enormous complexity and their spatial implication beyond the local level. Throughout the Austrian territory, numerous spaces exist that are perceived as regions, which are (very differently) organized and function as system of regional governance. Above all, it is communication-associated attributes (inclusion, activation, networking, interdependencies and cooperative arrangements) that make these regions relevant interaction spaces. Mostly, regions have emerged that are active in the fields of regional policy and development. Anyway, additional spatial configurations exist that have developed a governance level, such as tourism regions. As these spaces often – due to the different sectors they belong to – have not only different demarcations, actors and aims, they often run parallel to each other. Still, contemporary challenges of spatial development have made it possible to consider a further integration of different sectoral fields, in order to strengthen the finding of common solutions. On the example of a recent research and development project, the paper at hand will reflect in how far sectoral integration can support problem solving on the regional level and in how far the national level can support this integration on the regional level. The article not only provides insight into contemporary developments in regional policy in Austria, but further reflects on how tourism and regional policy can act as collaborative governance system. Results reveal that it needs a programmatic incentive to set-up collaboration, although interwoven challenges do exist.

**Keywords:** regional governance, Austria, tourism, regional development, spatial development, cooperation.

## Introduction

The regional level has gained importance when aiming to realize sustainable spatial development. In Austria, with its intricate spatial structure comprising numerous self-administered municipalities, especially since joining the European Union, but also in recent years, cooperation on the regional level between administrative authorities has been widely considered essential in solving spatial problems (Arbter, 2022; Stix, 2022). Different types and forms of regional cooperation and regional governance exist in the context of spatial planning and development in Austria and globally (OECD, 2022; Gruber & Heintel, 2024). Cooperation is thereby often incentivized or mandated by higher spatial authorities, but sometimes also voluntarily chosen since regional collaboration between municipalities still offers the best way to maintain autonomy and engage with citizens while addressing intricate problems (Zimmermann, 2019). Originally mostly focused on boosting regional economies and increase regional attractiveness, regional collaborative efforts today often encompass a wide array of topics, including the provision of essential public services or technical infrastructures, regional marketing campaigns, regional planning or business development (Chilla et al., 2016; Gruber & Heintel, 2024). Further, contemporary challenges, including climate change, digitalization, demographic shifts, mobility, migration, and the energy crises, which necessitate innovative collaborative approaches that are often touched upon in strategic documents of classic regional development systems or in even new regional initiatives (e.g. climate- and energy model regions KEM or climate change adaptation regions KLAR).

Although regional policy has the goal to harmonize various specialized policy fields (e.g. transport, agriculture, labour market, economy) in a specific area, following the objective of supporting quality of life and prosperity (Gruber et al., 2018), some sectors are observed to be lesser integrated in the context of regional policy. In Austria, this is true specifically for the tourism sector. Governance systems of regional policy and tourism – especially in intensive tourism regions – often have evolved as separate systems, despite their shared focus on spatial aspects. This is peculiar, particularly in Austria, where tourism holds a fundamental economic importance in numerous regions. Collaboration between the tourism sector and regional governance is often not uniformly established. Instead, particularly in regions heavily reliant on tourism, independent structures of tourism destination management and regional management have emerged. These structures either coexist alongside or even replace each other, depending on power relations and regional importance. Despite geographical overlaps, substantial interaction between the two sectors is often lacking. This is also true for the strategic visioning and support of regional and tourism policy, which in Austria is conducted at the national and federal level.

The research and development project GoRegion commissioned by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management and the Federal Ministry of Labour and Economy (both: Republic of Austria) and was initiated to address this missing interaction, with the major aim that, by doing so, regions in Austria will be strengthened to better react to the grand challenges of the presence. Throughout the project, it became evident that despite fragmented networking and cooperation in various regions, challenges faced by both governance systems (such as demographic changes, climate change, sustainability, and quality of life) are increasingly converging. In the project, potential avenues and catalysts for enhancing collaboration were identified and confirmed, indicating that not only moving beyond local, but also beyond sectoral solutions has become increasingly vital for effectively tackling complex societal issues.

The paper at hand will discuss the results gained from the project and reflect them in the context of the framework of collaborative governance. In the paper, insights of the project are used

to derive considerations for advancing cross-sectoral spatial policies as well as regional governance systems. Project results will be used to reflect the potential of collaboration over sectoral boundaries. Results will show that different access levels of collaborative governance and specifically their interplay are often needed to be able to implement cooperation across sectors. While collaborative governance can be incentivized, intrinsic motivation is still needed to perpetuate sustainable governance models. Anyway, the project results also underline top-down approaches as necessary first steps to implement changes specifically for newly arising spatial problems. In this context, regional platforms potentially play a crucial role as interfaces for coordinating and resolving issues that span various sectors and involve multiple stakeholders. The paper is structured as follows: At the beginning, the status quo of regional and tourism policy in Austria and its spheres of multi-level governance is presented; then cooperative governance is introduced as a theoretical framework; this is followed by results from the GoRegion project, which are then reflected upon and finally summarized.

## **Status quo: regional policy and tourism as diverging policy fields**

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the significance of the regional level in Austria – especially in the context of regional policy and spatial planning (Heintel, 2005; Weixelbaumer et al., 2015; Görgl et al., 2020; Görgl & Gruber, 2015; Schorn & Humer, 2021). Supporting the regional level is thereby a shared responsibility among the national government, the federal states, and the municipalities. In the last few years, the national level has intensified its support for the regional level and, especially, the professionalization of regional governance in various ways, aiming to enhance regional economic structures and the quality of life in the regions (ÖROK, 2015, 2016, 2020). The national government therefore holds a central role in promoting regional governance, particularly the department of ‘Regional Policy’, settled in the Austrian Ministry of Agriculture (BML). This department is viewed as a key partner for implementing regional cooperation. In general, its responsibilities include coordinating matters, particularly the alignment of national and federal interests concerning spatial planning, spatial development, and regional policy (see BMFLUW, 2023). The department also functions as a crucial advisor, offering recommendations, particularly regarding EU funding periods. Due to the absence of a national legislation on spatial development in Austria, the coordination tasks hold special importance (ÖROK, 2021).

The national government acts as an implementation partner, facilitating the alignment of diverse sector objectives, initiating collaborations, and establishing goals and agreements with the regions (e.g., bringing together public and private stakeholders) (ÖROK 2020, 2021). Furthermore, the national level is perceived as a central actor for nationwide networking of regional stakeholders and as a partner for reflection and collaborative development of monitoring elements to ensure an impact-oriented approach to activities at the regional governance level (ÖROK, 2015). The national government is consistently seen as a central actor and partner for strengthening the regional governance level, especially in ‘soft’ governance formats (Heintel, 2018) and particularly for cooperative steering modes (Nischwitz et al., 2002). The importance of a cooperative leadership approach has been highlighted in several strategic documents as an interplay between ‘bottom-up’ approaches and ‘top-down’ directives (ÖROK, 2015). In the future, strategic documents highlight that the regional governance level (RGL) in Austria should be strengthened even further. For this, a ‘Strategy for the Regions’ has been developed, promoting how the RGL should become a level of high importance for solving grand contemporary challenges (BML, 2022).

Strengthening the RGL has emerged as a primary task of Regional Policy in Austria in the last years, as challenges observed today may not be adequately addressed by local authorities. As is implicit in regional governance systems, different actors and sectors are also involved in spatial development at the regional level. Still, within the context of regional development, some sectors have been more involved than others. What has been observed especially is that tourism development has been rather excluded from concerns about spatial development lately. This is striking, as tourism has a special significance for the regional level in Austria; also conversely, regional governance for tourism development is crucial. A main idea to further strengthen the RGL was therefore not only to develop supporting tools that can be implemented by the national level to strengthen the RGL but also to offer an intersectional approach.

Although tourism is a main income field in many Austrian regions and, as such, a potential target area of regional policy, we find it today (on the national as well as the regional level) as a policy field that has evolved rather separately from spatial development, spatial planning or regional development. Further, tourism is a complex industry field as it is based on a complexly interwoven network, that comprises a touristic offer. The sustainable management of resources requires appropriate forms of cooperation between very different actors such as hoteliers, providers of touristic infrastructure (e.g. cable cars), farmers, hunting associations, the local population, guests and many more. Within regional development and tourism, there is a majority of actors, often with conflicting expectations on spatial development, which gives momentum for the need of further intersectional interfaces.

Tourism and regional policy are implemented and operated by a wide field of actors. Not only are the actors involved different, but their objectives and who they target with their activities. In regional development, activities primarily focus on the inhabitants of a respective region. Specific population sub-groups are of special interest (e.g. women or young people), along with former or future populations (migrants or emigrants). Further, entrepreneurs are important actors in regions and regional development, and also a target group for activities of regional development policies, which represents a certain overlap. Anyway, it will be discussed later that often touristic entrepreneurs are not so much in the focus of regional development policies. From a tourism standpoint, the focal point is mainly 'the guests and their needs' (Plan T Masterplan for Tourism). The DMO (Destination Management Organization or Destination Management Unit) is identified as the nucleus of a tourism destination organization. While the local population is not the central target audience of tourist offerings and activities, many strategic papers on visions and goals of tourism development increasingly mention the crucial role of the local population. Further, a changing role of the guest is referred to, e.g. in the Austrian tourism strategy (Plan T Masterplan for Tourism) it is noted that guests must be regarded not merely as tourists but as temporary inhabitants of a destination. Consequently, the relationship between guests and locals must be reconsidered (BMFLUW, 2017). This shift is also alluded to in the current Tyrolean Tourism Strategy (Land Tirol, 2021). Similarly, the tourism strategy of the state of Vorarlberg points out the changing roles of guests and the local population: Tourists and guests should be seen as temporary residents; likewise, the local population should be perceived as potential guests (AVL, 2022).

Still, for both regions and destinations, a similar objective exists: namely, to create attractive and viable spaces. The term 'quality of life' has increasingly come into focus in the context of regional development, becoming a prominent consideration in regional funding across different Structural Funds periods. However, the pursuit of creating attractive and viable spaces is often met with counteracting developments that pose substantial challenges. These challenges might be similar, but appear with different urgency and under different wordings, which becomes obvi-

ous when considering labour shortage and demographic decline. While regional policy – also often being a policy field explicitly in peripheral and rural regions – is interested in counteracting decline by providing attractive regions, tourism regions specifically since the COVID-19 pandemic have suffered from labour shortages.

Other similar topics exist that represent major main challenges in both fields, but are still approached differently and not jointly, such as sustainability and climate change, mobility (especially eco-friendly mobility), and ensuring essential services in rural areas (especially concerning childcare and work-family balance). The potential of digitalization has been referred to by actors in tourism and regional development and is also frequently cited in documents on regional development and tourism, but so have the associated challenges, including the need to establish adequate infrastructure. Macro trends like globalization and urbanization also present significant challenges to regions, potentially leading to emigration and population decline at the local level, which further result in labor shortage and demographic change. Demographic shifts, societal transformations, the intensification of the knowledge society, and evolving spatial behaviors of the population (notably the rise of multilocality and the expansion of second residences) are also named as challenges in strategic documents, especially in the context of regional development.

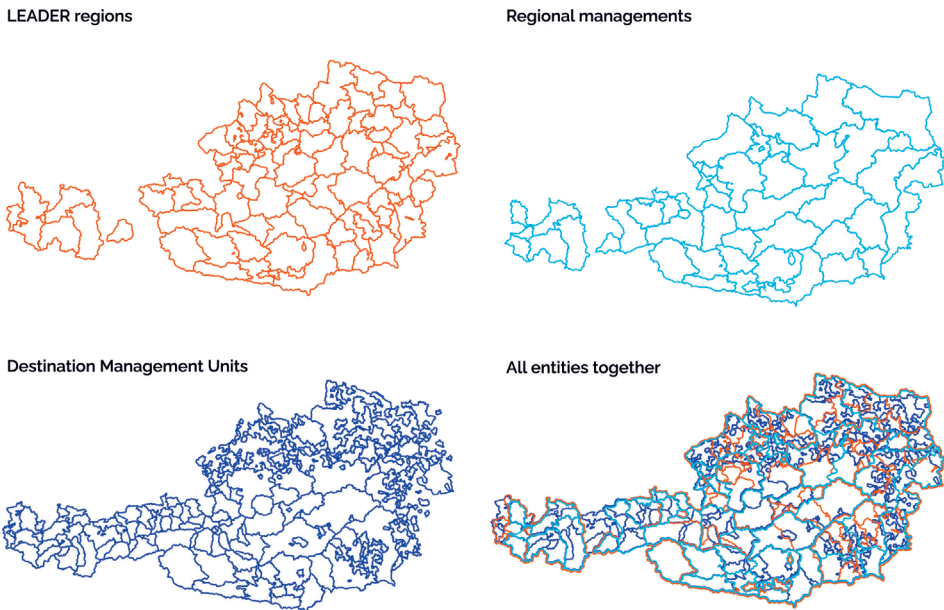
While the underlying challenges are similar, collaborative efforts between the tourism sector and regional development don't exist in many Austrian regions. Even the intensive use of tourism in certain regions is rather seen as a challenge within the framework of spatial development (tourism demand pressure conflicting with affordable housing, a desire for more sustainable tourism, challenges posed by 'overtourism', ÖROK, 2021). A study even recognized tourism intensity as a factor causing population decline in rural areas, noting that 16 out of 25 municipalities with the highest number of overnight stays (excluding major cities Vienna, Salzburg, Innsbruck, Graz, Villach, Linz) experienced a high amount of population decline (Dax et al., 2016). Tourism strategy documents refer to a lack of tourism awareness in the regions (BMFLUW, 2017), while regional development strategy papers stress the necessity of creating 'high-quality' or 'qualified' jobs (BMLFUW, 2019), which usually mean jobs outside of the tourism sector. Tourism documents then point out a growing reluctance towards investments that serve the tourism sector (BMLFUW, 2017).

The described challenges underscore the growing necessity of an integrated perspective on regions and destinations, driven both by observed divergences in interests between regions and destinations and by shared challenges. Recent publications in tourism research highlight the need for a balance between quality of life, competitiveness, and tourist use. Due to mounting challenges in tourism areas and commercial advantages, a paradigm shift has also been observed in the tourism sector in other regions outside Austria: from destination management to destination governance (Raich, 2006; Baggio et al., 2010; Pechlaner & Voggl, 2013). Changing the notion to 'destination governance' makes it possible to include the many perspectives and actors active in providing a touristic offer and steering a destination. Further, not only the provision side but also the tourists as part of the governance system have received attention (Pechlaner et al., 2022). Destinations have in recent years also changed in their size and composition. In the case of Austria, we were able to observe the merging of tourism destinations into regional compounds, changing a former local or municipal responsibility to cooperating units.

Recently, also the term 'destination' has been contested, and instead, a framework termed 'living space' has appeared in tourism research, referring to a holistic concept more encompassing regional aspects (local infrastructure not provided by tourism, residents' quality of life, and other industries like agriculture) (Land Tirol, 2021; AVL, 2022). Moving away from the destination has been

described as advantageous, especially in intensively touristic enclaves, which are increasingly suffering from overtourism. The concept of living space takes an integrated perspective on the space where tourism actually happens in order not to forget functions of this area that are not mainly for tourism but still important for tourism (e.g. authenticity, functionality, local society, etc.). The perspective should further allow us to better get over contemporary challenges such as the necessity to retain the local workforce, ensure the overall social compatibility of tourism, and bolster regional economic cycles together. This necessitates a more profound engagement with the respective understandings of space.

The term ‘living space’ aligns more closely with the notion of a ‘region’ than a ‘destination’: while the destination centers around the arriving individual, thereby providing services and infrastructure for visitors, the region is perceived as an autonomous actor system that formulates and advocates for its distinct regional development objectives (ÖROK, 2020, p. 6). This shift has not only been reported in the literature, but further has been observed in contemporary tourism strategies (BMNT, 2019; AVL, 2022; Pechlaner et al., 2022). Consequently, destinations can be described as territories that collectively provide services for travellers who are within their confines, while regions are holistic elements that include inhabitants, entrepreneurs and policymakers. Regions are mostly differentiated by criteria such as homogeneity or functionality. Collaborative efforts among locations sharing common attributes (e.g., similar economic structure or demographic trends) are intended to enhance their collective capacity to compete globally. Anyway, there is still evidence that, at many regional levels, we find tourism as a rather separate policy field. In many places, a coordination between tourism actors and regional development is lacking. Still, in many instances in Austria, there is a connection between regions and destinations. The touristic promotion of regions has, to a considerable extent, evolved from regional development initiatives.



**Figure 1.** Geographic delineation of regional management, LEADER regions and destination marketing organizations in Austria

Source: own illustration based on Statistik Austria, Netzwerk Zukunftsraum Land and information from federal state; 2023.



Moreover, considerations pertaining to site development and destination management are often intertwined. However, in regions heavily influenced by tourism, e.g. in the west of Austria, we also encounter numerous instances where the geographic delineation of regions and destinations markedly diverges. In some cases, regional development structures have become redundant or even obsolete in the presence of strong linkages within the tourism industry. Conversely, there are instances of overlap between tourism regions and regional development associations. In certain federal states, the geographies of these associations have been restructured in recent years (e.g., Lower Austria, Upper Austria, Styria, Tyrol). Figure 1 illustrates the (partially distinct, partially congruent) frameworks of regional management, LEADER regions, and tourism regions.

## **Theoretical framework: Implementing regional governance across sectors by collaborative governance effects**

Regional governance has become an essential element of strategic spatial planning in the last decades, not only to improve regional competitiveness, but also to strengthen regional identity and cohesion (Albrechts et al., 2003). The term portrays the involvement of various stakeholders in coordinating spatial development, moving beyond sovereign planning, and on a different scale of activity and a larger spatial context than the local level in order to successfully react to spatial challenges. Fürst (2001, p. 370) defines governance as the process of control for collective action, in which actors and organizations are connected and coordinated in such a way that jointly held or even developed goals can be pursued effectively. Regional governance should therefore provide information on who does what, when and how in order to enable collective action in a region. Regional governance refers to weakly institutionalized, more network-like forms of cooperation between regional actors for regional development tasks. Regional governance is primarily oriented towards the strategic options of regional control and the collective capacity of regional actor constellations to act. Subsequently, cooperative action processes, i.e., the process level, are of interest. The involvement of public, private sector, and civil society actors is today considered a success factor in regional development in particular (Benner, 2020; Döringer, 2020). However, governance is considered a complex system of actors, as it comprises both, formal as well as informal rules, norms and values. Governance is therefore understood as a strategic process of controlling the totality of formal and informal instruments.

Regional governance is related to the regional actor constellations and therefore context-related (Zimmermann, 2019). This means that the respective governance styles also differ in their characteristics from region to region and entail different forms of control (OECD, 2022; Gruber & Heintel, 2024). The extent to which regional governance becomes or remains manageable at all – referring to increasing complexity due to the expansion of the respective participants in the regional development process – therefore depends on the respective regional governance style. For example, regions with a long tradition of (self-sustaining) regional development and, in comparison, a region that can be described as an old industrial area or a mass tourism region. While in the former, regional governance structures have already developed over decades, often in a very heterogeneous and complex form, in the other examples, regional structures are often still in the process of being established. Regional governance is constituted primarily through communication (Fürst, 2001). The respective governance styles are therefore also dependent on regional communication. Already pronounced traditions in communication at the regional level

thus also determine or inhibit the collective capacity for action of a region. Regional governance styles are therefore not transferable one-to-one between different regions.

Networks and intermediary institutions are crucial for establishing communication at the regional level. Intermediary institutions play an important role as an interface in regional governance. Intermediary service providers are institutions that cannot be assigned to any of the traditional actor levels of the state, market or society. These include, for example, regional management or LEADER offices (Heintel, 2018). The emergence of this type of institution is in the context of changing areas of competence for public actors. Deregulation, liberalization and privatization tendencies in formerly public goods are the decisive factors for this new form of organization with successive institutional anchoring. The fulfillment of public tasks in the interests of the common good is generally at the forefront of the activities of intermediary institutions. As a result, participatory procedures are of great importance, including the representation of citizens' interests vis-à-vis the authorities (the advocacy function). Intermediary institutions build on cooperative relationships and work in networks. Intermediary institutions operate under different control logics while at the same time requiring a high degree of flexibility with regard to regional problems, necessary solutions, and varying participation of regional actor constellations. The hierarchical, vertical form of state control is thus supplemented, and in some cases replaced, by a multi-level political system (Arbter, 2022). New framework conditions (e.g. legislative changes and shifts in competencies) and incentive systems (e.g. project-related funding, establishment of networks based on transnational programs, competitive tendering procedures) can promote the development of regional governance competencies. From this perspective, new forms of governance at the regional level are being upgraded. This concerns both, the level of institutionalization and that of cooperation and communication in networks.

Collaborative governance has been developed at the interfaces of the field of environmental and economic research, as it intends to provide new structures to find novel policy solutions, where established organisations have failed (Dirix et al., 2013; Jungwirth & Müller, 2014; Koontz & Newig, 2014; Homsy et al., 2018; Schlüter et al., 2021). Collaborative governance has enrolled as complex questions of today can no longer be answered singularly, i.e. from a single specialist or departmental expertise. At the same time – just as simply put – a world with multilateral crises is becoming more complex. Just to stay with the spatial context and the immediate topic of tourism and regional development, topics such as climate, overtourism, mobility solutions, spatial conflicts, resource issues (e.g. water), energy, sustainability, resilience, etc., must be dealt with comprehensively, at least across sectors. While there are no explicit studies, reflecting on cooperation between regional development and tourism cooperation, we will apply collaborative governance in order to understand the intention of bringing these two sectors closer together. Collaborative governance can further support our understanding of bottom-up and top-down interplay (Eckerberg et al., 2015).

Literature has developed different access levels on how to resolve particular issues and take action in collaborative governance (see e.g. Margerum, 2008). The framework on collaborative governance by Franz & Heintel (2022) refers to three levels: (1) reactive cooperation; (2) programmatic-conceptual cooperation; (3) anticipatory cooperation. Reactive cooperation is derived from immediate pressure to act. Examples of this are often financial constraints or infrastructures and municipal services that need to be allocated in the interests of services of general interest. Programmatic-conceptual cooperation is based on an incentive system. Funding calls, programmatic requirements ('climate targets' etc.) mean that projects have to be acquired in cooperation. This often also concerns different scale levels in the sense of cooperative governance, as well as different stakeholders in the sense of inter- or transdisciplinarity. Anticipatory cooperation differs



from 1 and 2 in the highest degree of intrinsic motivation and voluntary cooperation. It is also neither backward-looking nor situational, but forward-looking. Simply put, problems are recognised in good time and the question is asked as to who can contribute to solving the problem in order to develop greater resilience (crisis resistance, robustness, effectiveness, etc.). Nevertheless, even within the framework of the cooperative state (Heintel, 2018), a management function is required that must be performed at the federal or national level, e.g. organizational function, orientation function, mediation function and supervision function (Danielzyk, 1998).

## **Bridging tourism and regional policy – results from GoRegion**

The research and development project GoRegion was initiated to address this missing interaction between regional policy and tourism governance in many regions across Austria. The project was purchased by the Austrian Ministry for Agriculture, with responsibilities of regional policy and tourism. The project team consisted of a transdisciplinary group including researcher and consultants with expertise from both fields: regional development and tourism. The project used techniques from empirical social research but was further designed as a development project with the goal of finding potential recommendations and solutions for implementation. For this, techniques from agile project management were used (Payer, 2022). Policy-interventions were prepared on the basis of needs and challenges addressed by actors from regional policy and tourism (collected via a survey), analysed and discussed in the form of user stories in order to develop use cases. Further case-studies and expert interviews with specific actors led to the implementation of strategic tools which should encompass a closer collaboration of regional policy and tourism.

Overall, GoRegion's central recommendation was to implement a pilot project to support both tourism-intensive and tourism-extensive regions in setting up and operating regional information and monitoring systems. In addition to the substantive results and recommendations, the project also contributes to supporting interdepartmental cooperation (federal level) between regional and tourism development at the organizational level. Additionally, the advice of the project team was to think about further intersections on the RGL, such as agriculture. The recommendations were picked up by the national government and found their way into concrete policy measures that will now be presented.

### **Evidence-based information for common actions**

The project 'Go-Region' has shown that intersectoral cooperation between regional development and tourism can be supported by one thing in particular: The development and joint use of regional information and monitoring systems (RESY). Such an approach makes it possible to achieve several complementary objectives (see Table 1). Above all, the creation and use of a thematically diverse database creates a common, integrated picture of the region – communication on an equal footing becomes possible. This makes it possible to base decisions and measures in the regions not only on the subjective feelings of the decision-makers, but also on a more or less unbiased database (although it should be noted that the decision-making process itself is always influenced by social dynamics). This simplifies the process of identifying similar needs for intervention and deriving joint strategies for the various regional stakeholders. A standardized regional data pool can be a good starting point and door opener for the necessary intersectoral discussions and cross-sector, future-oriented and sustainable regional management.

If standardized data is available for different regions, and for the supra-regional level, a further aspect can be added to the benefits: At this point, not only self-monitoring is possible, but also a comparison between different regions. Many developments can only be correctly interpreted through this contextualization. In addition, regions that have developed more dynamically from a similar starting point can be identified. Benchmarking with such regions and gaining knowledge from such regions is only possible with a standardized database.

**Table 1.** Main strenghts of a RESY

| <b>Support decision making</b>   | <b>Support cooperation</b>  |
|--|---|
| <b>Built a harmonized overview through a joint database</b><br>A broad thematic data dashboard should create a harmonized picture of the regions   | <b>Enable the communication of spaces and regions</b><br>The joint communication of the condition of the regions to the public can be supported   |
| <b>Enable benchmarking</b><br>Benchmarking among all regions can be made possible through nationwide data collection   | <b>Trigger discussions</b><br>The joint development and interpretation of data enables the exchange of perspectives   |
| <b>Facilitate the tracking of developments</b><br>Time series and forecasts enable the estimation of future action requirements<br>Support decision making<br>Neutral data presentation supports evidence-informed decision-making | <b>Strengthen intersectoral and interregional cooperation</b><br>The creation and use of a common tool for evidence-informed decision-making strengthens cooperation at organizational and conceptual level |

Source: own representation.

Based on these considerations, the ‘Go-Region’ project led to the ‘RESY’ project, in which the potential for strengthening cooperation between regional development and tourism in Austria was to be tested by setting up a RESY in two Austrian regions (Nationalpark Hohe Tauern and Wels). Based on numerous examples of good practices of regional information systems, a screening of national data providers was conducted and, together with regional stakeholders, basic indicators were defined that can be collected nationwide and thus enable Austria-wide regional benchmarking. Due to the different regional compositions mentioned above, it was important to ensure that these indicators were available at the appropriate spatial scale (municipal level or below). In addition to the conceptual examination of RESY, the support for the pilot regions also involved defining the organizational framework (communication, data retrieval, etc.) and providing support in defining the requirements and use cases of a RESY for tourism and regional development.

The project was able to show that the interest in a common regional database is very high in both tourism and regional development. The impulse for a joint RESY has noticeably increased the willingness to cooperate between tourism and regional development in both pilot regions. In addition, it was above all the collaborative interpretation of the data that brought the different perspectives closer together and provided a stimulus for cooperative development. Easy-to-understand data interpretations have proven to be particularly important. This is because knowledge of regional developments is not shared equally among regional stakeholders.

However, it has also been shown that a clear definition of the product and the objectives pursued with it are needed first in order to bundle regional resources. It has also been revealed that data availability is poor in some relevant subject areas. This applies in particular to the areas of environment and mobility, which are becoming increasingly relevant in tourism and regional development but only provide few homogenized data. Finally, the ongoing operation of the RESY was also an important point of discussion. In particular, data updating should be as simple and automated as possible in order to guarantee a permanent database. If these requirements are met,

a RESY can create a good starting point for increased regional cooperation between tourism and regional development.

### **Institutionalising intersectional support**

While not yet in the implementation at the date of writing this paper, but at the beginning of being implemented, another aspect was followed up by the national level in order to give more support to the RGL: the tendering of an interface management platform, the platform Austria. The platform should institutionalize intersectional support and intersectional cooperation at different levels. The RGL is the main target group for this vertical support. While the department for regional policy has so far had the main responsibility for this platform, there is a clear notion of sharing this responsibility with respect to different topics.

With the official tendering of the platform, a vision that has been developed over the last years is seemingly being implemented. In strategic documents on the RGL in Austria, the implementation of a platform that offers dialogue between regions and national and federal levels has already been sketched as a future endeavor (ÖROK 2020, p. 57 ff). Also, throughout the GoRegion project, feedback was given at various key points in the development of the dialog platform concept, particularly regarding the description of the service portfolio. The project recommended carefully to consider the range of services to be provided in order to not make it unlikely to be able to offer the service, also considering also a long-term perspective. Another recommendation was that, due to limited resources, it will probably be necessary to carefully select and deploy suitable measures based on the situation and context. Decisions should not be arbitrary, considering the need for efficiency and effectiveness. This leads to the idea of maintaining both, continuity and agility, a concept previously explored in a preliminary project (see Fischer, 2022).

The dialogue platform as it is planned today is sketched in the tendering documents: The platform should be the main tool to implement the Austrian Strategy for the Regions ('Regionen-Strategie'; BML, 2022). In this manner, the overall aim is to support regions in tackling contemporary challenges and, contribute to equal living conditions, enable equal opportunities and reduce location disadvantages. The regional dialogue platform will consist of analog and digital tools for vertical cooperation across sectors between the national, federal and local level, between urban and rural areas, and explicitly incorporating regions for specific topics with a regional scope.

In order to give an idea how this platform should work, one module has already been developed. To give answers to how municipalities should organize local daily supply, the platform serves as a networking and information hub by offering contact information for support for all federal states, information on workshops in different locations for innovation and ideas, best practice collection, as well as guidelines (see BML, 2023). Over the next three years, according to the tender, other topics with a regional scope will be picked up by the platform in order to support the RGL. In the tender, different topics are mentioned, such as land consumption and soil protection. The platform is not only a website with information and links but also represents the main interface for interaction, e.g. for the creation of networks or offering of education and training elements for regional actors. A further element is the idea of including stakeholders across different sectors, especially since during the GoRegion project it was learned how different spheres on the regional level hardly interact.

## Discussion: Implementing collaborative governance

The regional level is today perceived as a level where spatial challenges can be addressed most effectively, especially in the context of regional governance with the possibility to integrate not only public, but also non-governmental and private actors. Anyway, complex questions of today that cannot be answered with a singular expertise require new formats of collaborative governance in order to implement an integrative perspective. The aim of the project GoRegion was to add a complementary perspective of regional policy and tourism policy to address overlapping challenges jointly by the two sectors and create networks of these two often not combined policy fields on the regional level.

With the development of the RESY tool through a pilot action with two regions involved, two level types of collaborative governance were able to be implemented: a re-active cooperation, as two regions with a specific challenge needed to apply for a call, in order to serve as pilot regions and a programmatic-conceptual approach, as funding was provided to dedicate to a specific challenge. Even though challenges would have existed without a programme that would support the collaborative efforts, the project has shown that for specific challenges it needs top-down processes to be implemented first, for a reactive collaboration to be started. What cannot be foreseen is in how far an anticipatory collaboration will be implemented through the first steps. It might also be possible that further programmatic inputs are needed, in order to set the stage for future (non-incentivised) collaborations. With the concrete tool provided as an output, the intention was at least to offer basis for evidence that should allow the observation of trends and challenges on the regional level and thus generate new arenas for collaboration from 'bottom-up'.

Still, during the project, it became obvious that a 'container-logic' is often built up over many years and therefore exists in many spheres and throughout different levels; this goes as far as educational systems, study programs, but also departments, responsible stakeholders, the collection of statistical datasets, etc. During the project, it became clear that in order to overcome the logic of different systems, building up a common perspective on specific problems can support integration. A problem-focused perspective is therefore fundamental for collaborative efforts across sectors. Engaging in more cooperative problem-solving can be promoted by offering support in specific themes, such as regional information systems. By working together on specific problems, it can be possible to build up a network, learn about different perspectives on the problem, and also become acquainted with different languages spoken in different sectors. It has become evident throughout the project that even though problems might be similar, languages and perspectives differ. Only by working together was understanding between the two different fields able to be implemented, which is a main basis for further consideration. This argument refers to the different governance styles that exist and governance being mainly an instrument of communication.

The tendering of an interface management platform presents the next steps for a further integrated governance approach on specific challenges. The main idea was to support the lack of interfaces at the regional level that can mediate between the various hierarchical and thematic levels in a coordinated manner. Bringing together different expertise and providing networks on specific topics should be eased by an online platform that should support the building up of communities.

While building up or enlarging networks at the regional level might lead to greater problem-solving competence, which has been an argument to include the tourism sector in discussions on regional development, it should not be forgotten that governance systems still need to be manageable. At the same time, however, it is also important not only to identify the relevant stakeholders,

but also to integrate them into development processes. The RGL therefore also potentially needs support from supraregional levels in the future, not only to transfer expertise but also to be able to implement or adapt a novel governance style that can encompass higher complexity. Regional governance structures can be established and developed integrative, in parallel with or alongside established government structures, or they can emerge on their own.

The actual steering possibilities and effectiveness of the interface between tourism and regional development at the regional level of action in terms of regional governance cannot yet be adequately assessed at present. Regional management will probably also continue to follow different objectives in the future, depending on whether the region is tourism-intensive or tourism-extensive. Peripheral rural regions will also be organized differently from regions close to urban agglomerations. Despite the ongoing discussions about regional governance management in the field of tourism and regional development in Austria, there is already a great need for examples of good governance styles, especially to enable transfer services between regions. The 'scaling' and 'perpetuation' of successful projects can certainly be seen as objective of the federal administration. According to institutionalization, regional governance is characterized by numerous parallel and complementary structures and is thus a sign of a gradual softening of strictly defined federal hierarchical structures and responsibilities. Anyway, as targeted cooperation between public, intermediary and private institutions is becoming increasingly important in the context of tourism and regional development in the sense of governance the regulatory function of a federal administration at the vertical level is also required accordingly.

Collaborative governance arises from a needs orientation (if it is recognized as such or as an opportunity), which can also be promoted externally or is based on external incentive systems. In concrete terms, collaborative governance is thematically oriented and functionally selective. It can therefore never be effective in all areas at the regional level. It will be necessary to bundle different management logics on common interests in the sense of collective development capability. This will continue to require accompanying processes at different levels, including top-down processes.

## **Conclusion and Outlook**

The GoRegion research and development project was launched to address the lack of interaction among regional development and tourism on the regional level in Austria, with the primary goal of strengthening them to better respond to current major challenges. The project was further to reflect on the role of the national level in supporting regions and destinations across both sectors. Both governance systems are facing today similar challenges such as demographic changes, climate change, sustainability, and quality of life. The project identified potential ways and catalysts to enhance collaboration, highlighting the increasing importance of moving beyond local solutions to effectively address complex societal issues. As part of the GoRegion project, a national-level process was initiated in Austria to support the integration of regional development policy and tourism in the future, as well as to establish common goals.

Although much has been invested programmatically in cross-sectoral work in the context of regional development within Austria and the European Union, although regional development actors interact with different governance logics at different levels, it can be seen from many examples of everyday practice that integrative forms of collaborative governance continue to raise many questions. Especially in those regions that have internalized actor constellations with long traditions of very specific negotiation styles and bartering, it is difficult to establish new forms

of regional governance. Bringing tourism and regional development, at least in tourism-intensive regions, into collaboration remains a challenge equally as an opportunity for the near future.

## References

- Albrechts, L., Healey, P., & Kunzmann, K. R. (2003). Strategic spatial planning and regional governance in Europe. *Journal of the American Planning Association*, 69(2), 113–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01944360308976301>
- Arbter, R. (2022). Die Bedeutung vertikaler Governance für die Umsetzung regionalpolitischer Strategien und Programme. In Y., Franz & M., Heintel (Eds.). *Kooperative Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung* (pp. 45–60). Wien: facultas.
- AVL (2022). Chancenreicher und nachhaltiger Qualitätstourismus 2030. „Vorarlberger Orte und Räume für das gute Leben“ Tourismusstrategie Vorarlberg 2030. Bregenz: *Amt der Vorarlberger Landesregierung*.
- Baggio, R., Scott, N., & Cooper, C. (2010). Improving tourism destination governance: a complexity science approach. *Tourism Review*, 65(4), 51–60. <https://doi.org/10.1108/16605371011093863>
- Benner, M. (2020). Mitigating human agency in regional development: The behavioural side of policy processes. *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 7(1), 164–182. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2020.1760732>
- BML (2022). *Meine Region – Unser Weg. Heimat. Zukunft. Lebensraum*. Wien: Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft.
- BML (2023). Regionen Portal. Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft. Retrieved from <https://info.bml.gv.at/themen/regionen-raumentwicklung/regionen-dialogplattform-nahversorgung.html> (last accessed 17 December 2023)
- BMLFUW (2017). *Masterplan Ländlicher Raum. Wien. Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft, Vienna*.
- BMLFUW (2023). GoRegion: Die Gestaltungs- und Steuerungsrolle des Bundes für die regionale Handlungsebene (Regional Governance) in Österreich – Erfahrungen, Bedarfspotenziale und mögliche Angebote am Beispiel des Tourismus; Endbericht. Wien: Bundesministerium für Land- und Forstwirtschaft, Regionen und Wasserwirtschaft.
- BMNT (2019). Plan T – Masterplan Tourismus. Wien: Bundesministerium für Nachhaltigkeit und Tourismus.
- Chilla, T., Kühne, O., & Neufeld, M. (2016). *Regionalentwicklung*. Stuttgart: Verlag Eugen Ulmer. <https://doi.org/10.36198/9783838545660>
- Danielczyk, R. (1998). *Zur Neuorientierung der Regionalforschung*. Oldenburg: Bibliotheks- und Informationssystem der Universität Oldenburg. Wahrnehmungsgeographische Studien zur Regionalentwicklung, 17.
- Dax, T., Fidschuster, L., Fischer, M., Hiess, H., Oedl-Wieser, T., & Pfefferkorn, W. (2016). *Regionen mit Bevölkerungsrückgang; Experten-Impulspapier zu regional- und raumordnerischen Entwicklungs- und Anpassungsstrategien. Analyse und strategische Orientierung*. Endbericht im Auftrag des Bundeskanzleramts Österreich. Wien: BKA.
- Dirix, J., Peeters, W., Eyckmans, J., Jones, P. T., & Sterckx, S. (2013). Strengthening bottom-up and top-down climate governance. *Climate Policy*, 13(3), 363–383. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14693062.2013.752664>
- Döringer, S. (2020). Governance entrepreneurship in regional economic development: individual agency in Austria. *Regional Studies, Regional Science*, 7(1), 550–567. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21681376.2020.1842801>
- Ebenstreit, D., Fischer, M., Grösswang, F., Gruber, E., Heintel, M., Payer, H., & Stolba, P. (2024). Etablierung von Regionalen Informations- und Monitoringsystemen zur Stärkung der Kooperation zwischen Tourismus und Regionalentwicklung; Erfahrungen aus den Projekte GoRegion und RESY. In T., Bieger, P., Beritelli & C., Laesser (Eds.). *Schweizer Jahrbuch für Tourismus 2023/2024* (pp. 157–168). Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag.
- Eckerberg, K., Bjärstig, T., & Zachrisson, A. (2015). Incentives for collaborative governance: Top-down and bottom-up initiatives in the Swedish mountain region. *Mountain Research and Development*, 35(3), 289–298. <https://doi.org/10.1659/MRD-JOURNAL-D-14-00068.1>



- Fischer, M. (2022). *Regionale Handlungsebene stärken. Auf dem Weg zu einer regionalpolitischen Toolbox („Österreich-Plattform“)*. Wien: Internes Arbeitsdokument im Auftrag des BML.
- Franz, Y., & Heintel, M. (2022). Kooperative Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung – eine Einleitung. In Y., Franz, & M., Heintel (Eds.). *Kooperative Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung* (pp. 15–22). Wien: facultas.
- Fürst, D. (2001). Regional governance – ein neues Paradigma der Regionalwissenschaften? *Raumforschung und Raumordnung*, 59, 370–380. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03183038>
- Görgl, P., & Gruber, E. (2015). Die kooperative Stadt der Zukunft? In J. Fritz, & N. Tomaschek (Hsrg.), *Die Stadt der Zukunft: Aktuelle Trend und zukünftige Herausforderungen*, (1 Aufl., Band 4, S. 267–279). Waxmann Verlag.
- Görgl, P., Döringer, S., & Herburger, J. (2020). Miteinander statt nebeneinander! Strategien für die Weiterentwicklung interkommunaler Kooperationsstrukturen in der „Wiener Stadtregion“. *Raumforschung und Raumordnung | Spatial Research and Planning*, 78(4), 377–395. <https://doi.org/10.2478/rara-2020-0018>
- Gruber, E., & Heintel, M. (2024). Kooperative Formen der Regionalentwicklung und Standortpolitik. In U., Grabski-Kieron, S., Kordel, C., Krajewski, I., Mose & A., Steinführer (Eds.). *Geographie ländlicher Räume* (pp. 242–248). Paderborn: Brill – Schöningh.
- Gruber, M., Kanonier, A., Pohn-Weidinger, S., & Schindelegger, A. (2018). *Raumordnung in Österreich Bezüge zur Raumentwicklung und Regionalpolitik. ÖROK Schriftenreihe 202*. Wien: Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz.
- Heintel, M. (2005). *Regionalmanagement in Österreich: Professionalisierung und Lernorientierung* (Vol. 8). Institut für Geographie und Regionalforschung der Universität Wien.
- Heintel, M. (2018). Regionalmanagement. *Handwörterbuch der Stadt- und Raumentwicklung* (pp. 2023–2028). Hannover: ARL.
- Homsy, G. C., Liu, Z., & Warner, M. E. (2018). Multilevel Governance: Framing the Integration of Top-Down and Bottom-Up Policymaking. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 42(7), 572–582. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2018.1491597>
- Jungwirth, C., Müller, E.F. (2014). Comparing Top-Down and Bottom-Up Cluster Initiatives from a Principal-Agent Perspective: What We Can Learn for Designing Governance Regimes. *Schmalenbach Business Review*, 66, 357–381. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03396911>
- Koontz, T. M., & Newig, J. (2014). From planning to implementation: Top-down and bottom-up approaches for collaborative watershed management. *Policy Studies Journal*, 42(3), 416–442. <https://doi.org/10.1111/psj.12067>
- Land Tirol (2021). *Tiroler Weg. Perspektiven für eine verantwortungsvolle Tourismusentwicklung*. Land Tirol, Tirol Werbung, Wirtschaftskammer Tirol & Verband der Tiroler Tourismusverbände Innsbruck.
- Margerum, R. D. (2008). A typology of collaboration efforts in environmental management. *Environmental Management*, 41, 487–500. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00267-008-9067-9>
- Nischwitz, G., Molitor, R., & Rohne, S. (2002). Local and Regional Governance für eine nachhaltige Entwicklung. Schriftenreihe des IÖW 161/02. Berlin.
- OECD (2022). *Regional Governance in OECD Countries: Trends, Typology and Tools*. OECD Multi-level Governance Studies. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/4d7c6483-en>
- ÖROK (2015). Die regionale Handlungsebene stärken – Fachliche Empfehlungen und Materialienband. *ÖROK Schriftenreihe 194*. Wien: Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz.
- ÖROK (2016). Agenda Stadtregionen in Österreich – Empfehlungen der ÖREK-Partnerschaft Kooperationsplattform Stadtregionen. *ÖROK Schriftenreihe 198*. Wien: Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz.
- ÖROK (2020). Die regionale Handlungsebene stärken: Status, Impulse & Perspektiven. *ÖROK Schriftenreihe 208*. Wien: Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz.
- ÖROK (2021). Österreichisches Raumordnungskonzept ÖREK 2030. Raum im Wandel. *ÖROK Schriftenreihe 210*. Wien: Österreichische Raumordnungskonferenz.
- Payer, H. (2022). Agile Arbeitsweisen in Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung – Potenziale und Perspektiven. In Y., Franz & M., Heintel (Eds.). (2022). *Kooperative Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung* (pp. 222–243). Wien: facultas.

- Pechlaner, H., & Volgger, M. (2013). Towards a comprehensive view of tourism governance: Relationships between the corporate governance of tourism service firms and territorial governance. *International Journal of Globalisation and Small Business*, 5(1–2), 3–19. <https://doi.org/10.1504/IJGSB.2013.050484>
- Pechlaner, H., Innerhofer, E., Gruber, M., Scuttari, A., Walder, M., Habicher, D., Gigante, S., Volgger, M., Corradini, P., Laner, P., & von der Gracht, H. (2022). *Ambition Lebensraum Südtirol. Auf dem Weg zu einer neuen Tourismuskultur. Landestourismusentwicklungskonzept 2030+*. Bozen: Eurac Research.
- Raich, F. (2006). *Governance Räumlicher Wettbewerbseinheiten, Ein Ansatz für die Tourismus-Destination*. Wiesbaden: DUV.
- Schlüter, M., Lindkvist, E., & Basurto, X. (2021). The interplay between top-down interventions and bottom-up self-organization shapes opportunities for transforming self-governance in small-scale fisheries. *Marine Policy*, 128, 104485. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.marpol.2021.104485>
- Schorn, M., & Humer, A. (2021). Editorial: The Geography and Governance of Infrastructure Provision. *Europa XXI*, 41, 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.7163/Eu21.2021.41.6>
- Stix, E. (2022). Kooperative Raumentwicklung – das ÖREK 2030. In Y., Franz & M., Heintel (Eds.). (2022). *Kooperative Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung* (pp. 61–74). Wien: facultas.
- Weixlbaumer, N., Siegrist, D., Mose, I., & Hammer, T. (2015). Participation and Regional Governance. A Crucial Research Perspective on Protected Areas Policies in Austria and Switzerland. In R., Gambino & A., Peano (Eds.). *Nature Policies and Landscape Policies. Urban and Landscape Perspectives* (pp. 207–215). Cham: Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05410-0\\_23](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-05410-0_23)
- Zimmermann, K. (2018). Kooperation, interkommunale und regionale. *Handwörterbuch der Stadt- und Raumentwicklung* (pp. 1211–1219). Hannover: ARL.

